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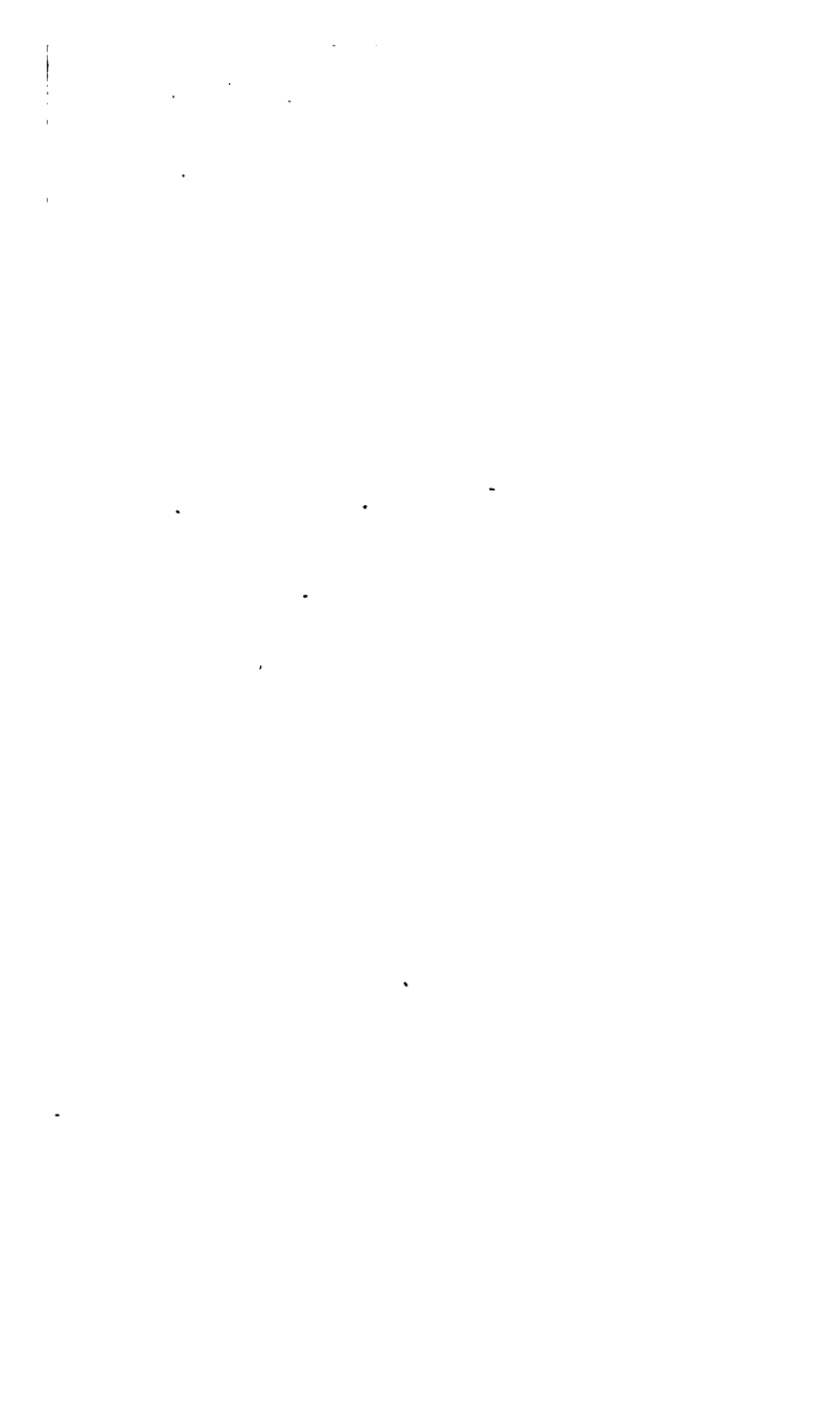


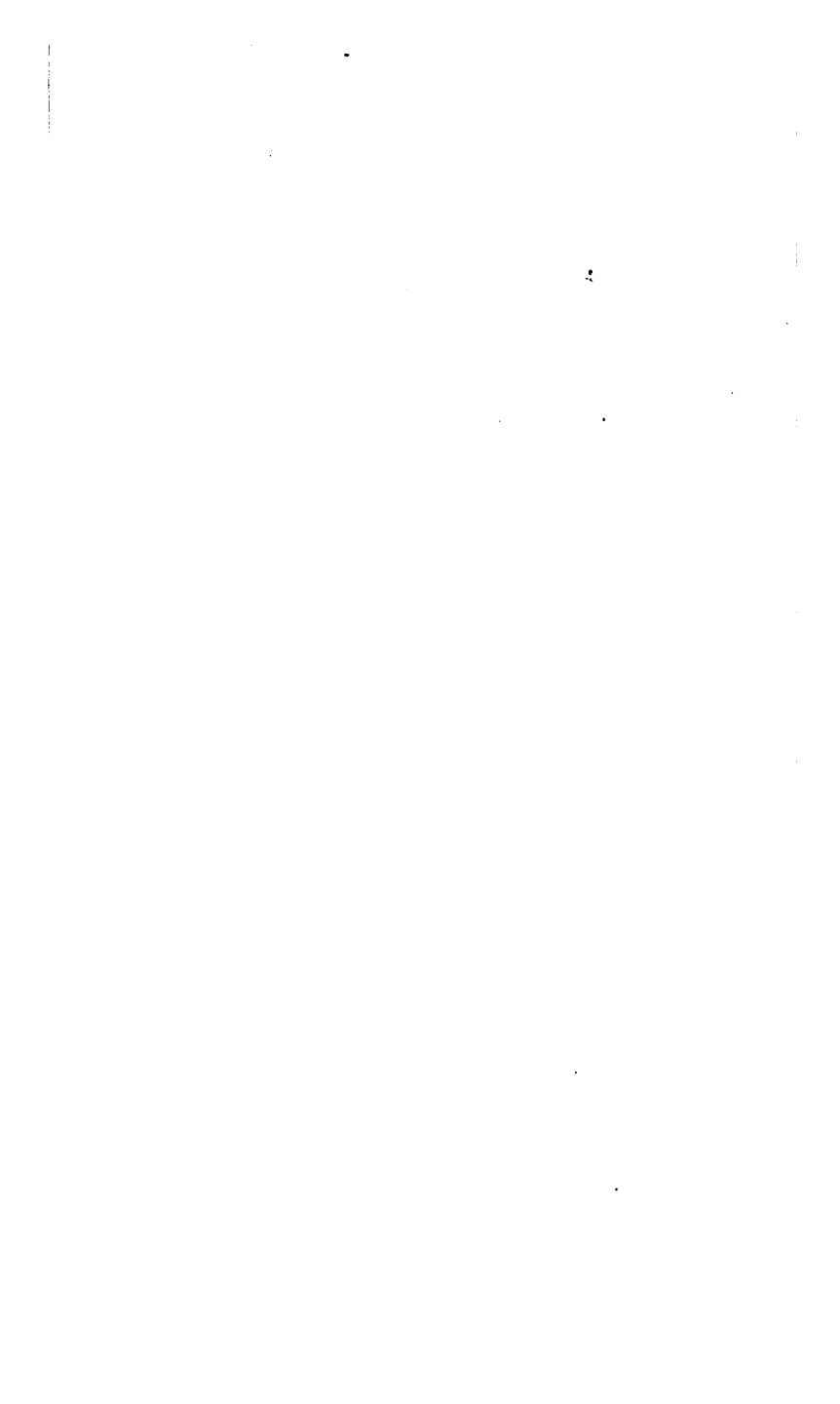
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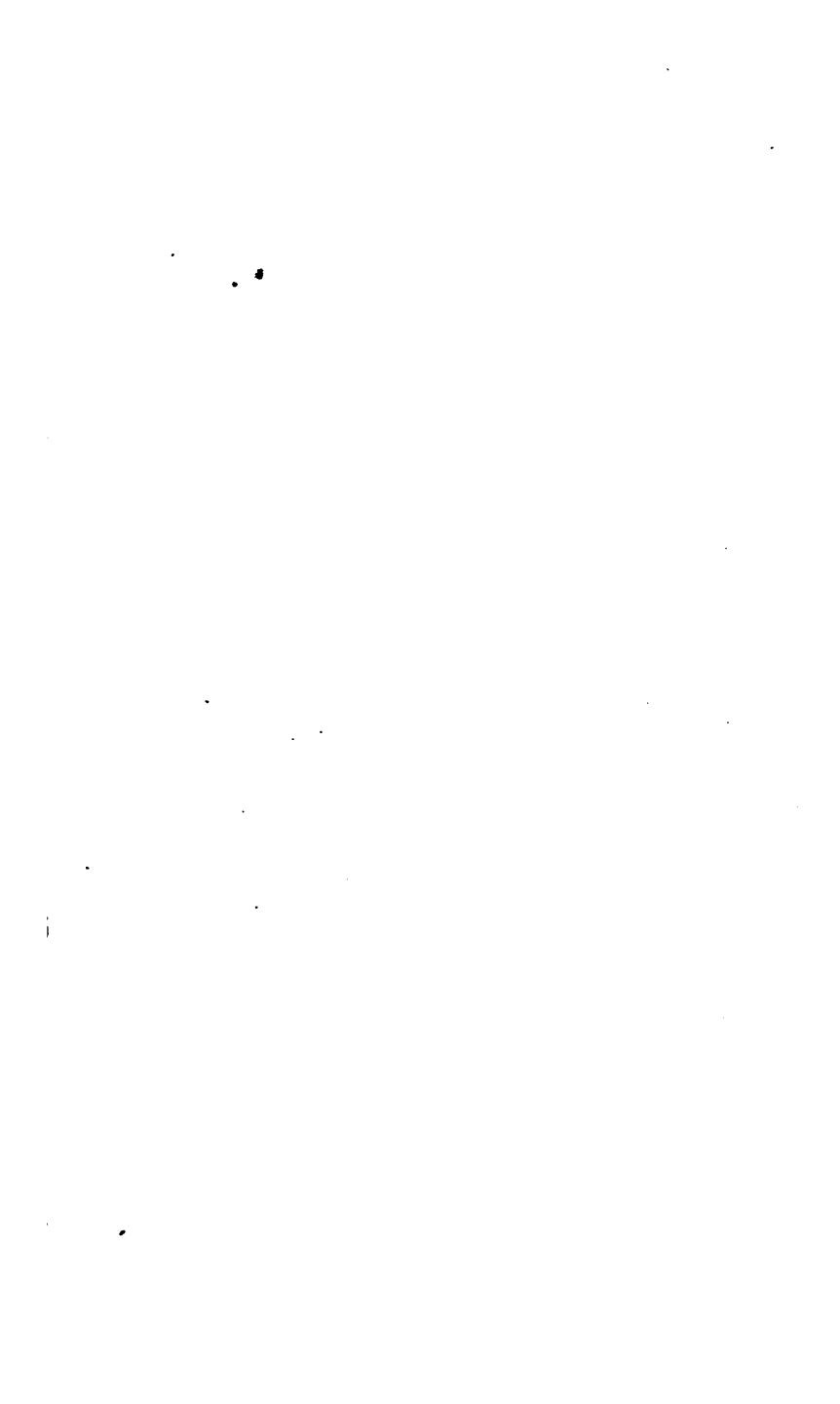
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COMMENTS
ON
THE EPISTLES,

AS APPOINTED TO BE
READ AT THE COMMUNION TABLE,
ON THE
SUNDAYS AND HOLIDAYS THROUGHOUT
THE YEAR.

FOR THE USE OF FAMILIES.

BY
THE REV. J. FREDERICK HONE, M.A.,
VICAR OF TIRLEY, GLOUCESTER.

LONDON:
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TO

THE RIGHT REVEREND

JAMES HENRY, LORD BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER
AND BRISTOL.

MY DEAR LORD,

IN availing myself of the privilege so kindly accorded to me, of bringing my little volume before the public under the sanction of your Lordship, I must offer, I fear, the usual plea of young authors, inexperience. To your Lordship, as a distinguished scholar and critic, I know that I ought greatly to apologize. But I feel confident that, like all critics of real eminence, your Lordship will be generous as well as just, and make full allowance, in the excellency of the object, for the defectiveness of the execution. I doubt not, that as a chief Minister of our Church, your Lordship will regard even with partiality, an attempt to introduce religion into the families of Churchmen, and will contemplate with peculiar favour the author's design of adapting a portion of the Church Service to the needs of heads of families, and by that and every other means in his power, "bringing all into whose hands his book may fall, unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in

Christ, that there be no place left among them, either for error in religion or for viciousness in life." The Work was in the first instance undertaken with the view of placing before my own parishioners a manual for the guidance of their families. I trust, however, and with the blessing of God and your Lordship's countenance I doubt not, that the measure of its usefulness will be more widely extended, and that it will promote in its little sphere, and during its career, long or short, the spiritual welfare of many. That such may be a result of its publication I most fervently pray; and under the natural protection of your Lordship, as the spiritual father of the diocesan family, may its course be made to prosper.

I have the honour to be, my dear Lord,

With great truth,

Your Lordship's very faithful and obliged servant,

J. FREDERICK HONE.

TIRLEY VICARAGE, GLOUCESTER,

February 12th, 1842.

PREFACE.

THE Epistle is a certain portion of Scripture, appointed to be read at the Communion Table on Sundays and certain other solemn days, immediately after the Collect for the day. It is called the Epistle, because it is taken, generally speaking¹, from the Epistles of the New Testament, books so called because originally sent as letters to the churches, places, or individuals, to whom they are addressed. The reading of this portion of Scripture, as well as of that which immediately follows, called the Gospel, is of very ancient date in the Church. "That a portion out of one of the Epistles," says Dr. Nicholls, "written by the holy Apostles, was read constantly when the Communion was celebrated, in the primitive Church, may be proved from many passages out of ancient writers. These readings, indeed, out of the Epistles were larger portions than the Epistles now read. But, however, they are of so long standing, that a writer who flourished near a

¹ Some of the Epistles are taken from the Prophets, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Book of the Revelations.

thousand years ago could not assign the time of their original." And Wheatley adds, "so that they have most of them belonged to the same Sundays and holidays we now use them on, for above twelve hundred years, as I might easily show also from several authorities." If the interest, then, attached to these portions of Scripture could by possibility be increased by anything extraneous to themselves, this circumstance of their antiquity would greatly enhance them in the eyes of Churchmen. Indeed it is on this, as well as on other accounts, that the attention of the Author has been drawn to the Epistles. Selected originally by the ancients, and but slightly altered by the moderns; selected, for the most part, from the writings of the Apostles of the Lord Jesus; well adapted to the days to which they are, in their present form, appended; and used in their present form by the Church, with almost one consent, for many generations; they appear well calculated to carry out the great object of their position in the Prayer Book, the edification and improvement of Churchmen in private. Acting, then, upon the principle of Dean Stanhope's argument, that "since these passages are singled out for such times as are supposed to draw the greatest numbers together, it is a fair intimation, and fit to be taken by the generality of

people, that such portions of the Bible are not only of singular profit when rightly understood, but are likewise best suited to the capacities of common men," the Author has attempted his present Comments on the Epistles. And in doing this he has offered such explanations and made such practical applications of the subject of each Epistle, as he trusts may prove profitable to Christian families¹. He has especially had in view in his labours the convenience of heads of families, and the edification of their households, and he trusts that his labours for their welfare may not be in vain². To the Church, then, that is in the house of every head of a family, does the Author commend the following pages, in the hope that they may tend, in and through God's grace, to glorify Him "by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified," and enable "every member of the same, in his vocation and ministry, to truly and godly serve Him, through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen."

¹ It will be observed, in the course of this Work, that the history of a Saint is only entered upon in the Comments, when his name occurs in the Epistle for the day.

² For the sake of greater completeness, Comments on certain days, appointed by authority to be kept holy, have been added.

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COMMENTS ON THE EPISTLES.

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

THE EPISTLE. *Romans xiii.*, 8 to 14.

8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

9 For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

11 And that, knowing the time,

that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed.

12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts *thereof*.

Let there be but one debt that we owe, and let that debt be love. It is a debt that we must always owe, always pay, and can never entirely discharge. It is a debt that we owe to every body, and every body owes to us; a debt which comprehends every obligation; and, when felt to be really due, will dispose us to attempt the fulfilment of every obligation. If the Holy Spirit has engrafted this great Christian principle in our hearts, we shall neither kill, steal, covet, bear false witness, commit adultery, nor do any other unholy thing displeasing to God. Our tongues will be under control; our hearts will be watchful; our lives active services of love. Quarrels will cease; envyings will cease; ill-usage will cease; bad manners will cease. But let it also be remembered that if in any one of these things we transgress, and the transgression is habitual, the love thus commended is not in us. We cannot really love God, if we do not love our neighbour; and if we do not love God, we are without an essential feature of all true religion.

It should be a main consideration then with us at all times, whether and how far this fundamental principle of love to God has taken root in our hearts. Do we really love God? Do we look to the Lord Jesus Christ as a Saviour, a Teacher, a Guide, an example, a consolation? Do we believe in him, fear him, love him, trust to him, honour him, call upon him, imitate him, as we ought to do? And do we remember always, that the love of our neighbour does not more completely comprehend every commandment of the second table, than ought this love of the Lord Jesus Christ to comprehend the love of our neighbour; that the two are linked together and cannot possibly exist asunder; that he who loves God must love his brother also; that he who loves not his brother cannot possibly love his God?

The Epistle for the day gives us an opportunity of ascertaining the truth of this doctrine and our duty thereupon, with clearness and accuracy. First, it lays down *the principle* on which the Christian must do his duty to his neighbour. And the principle it lays down is love. "Owe no man any thing," it says, "but to love one another. He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery; Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not bear false witness; Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Love then is *the principle*, on which the Christian must do his duty to his neighbour; the principle that will enable him to do it; the principle that can alone make the service acceptable. And why will it appear most judicious as well as essential to have made love the ground of duty? Because as a principle of action, it possesses great power and mighty energies, and, wherever it exists, carries every thing away with it captive.

Look at self-love, for instance, in its least objectionable form, the form of a natural impulse, which moves a man to make provision for his own necessities, before he makes provision for the necessities of others. How diligently does he set to work; and how cunningly, carefully, assiduously, does he fulfil and perfect his work! But Christianity sets up a rival to self, and bids us do as much for a *neighbour*. And if we only did as much, how much should we do! If we only felt as strongly, how strongly should we feel! How great would be our love of our neighbour, if we loved our neighbour as ourselves!

How very good should we be to our neighbour, if we used him as we would have him use us! We should even "love our enemies; do good to them that hate us; and bless them that despitefully use us and persecute us!" And again, look at love, as a principle of action in a *relative* point of view. See how it works in a father, a child, a friend. Look at the affection subsisting between husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, and all near relatives, and the thousand little kindnesses springing therefrom; the many tender anxieties; the unceasing labours of love; the disinterested endeavours to serve one another; the various sacrifices made; the endless benefits conferred; all proceeding from the love which each has for the other. But Christianity bids the parent, the husband, the wife, the brother, the child, go forth into the wide world and do likewise. It bids them extend the hand of fellowship, the bond of brotherhood, the office of benevolence, to all that live. It bids them expand their love, and give it breadth and length, as well as depth and height. It takes them beyond the family circle, and introduces them to the family of Christ, even to that body of which all believers are members, and all own Christ as the Head; yea, and to the whole family of man.

But there is one point of view in particular, in which we must contemplate the love of a Christian, and by which perchance we shall be constrained, if as yet we have it not, to desire it more earnestly, and that is, the *obligation* under which we stand to love one another. None of us can be so ignorant as not to know, that it is Christ's command that we love one another; and hence love becomes a debt, a debt to our fellow-creatures, and a debt to God. We feel the obligation of a worldly debt; and when it is paid, the obligation ceases. But our debt of love, as Christians, is binding for ever. We must for ever pay it, and we must for ever owe it. It is a daily due as long as we live; but it is a due not burdensome, because the payment is pleasant. And if through our sin and infirmity, we fail in the payment, Christ, besought earnestly in prayer, will enable us to pay the debt better in future. Indeed he does this more or less under any circumstances, unless a man turns and will not follow God. In that case there is no satisfaction, no suretiship, and the debtor pays the penalty both with soul and body in hell.

And what, finally, is our duty in connection with this doc-

¹ Matt. v., 44.

trine, and the present season? Is it not that we examine ourselves, whether we are fulfilling the law of love, working no ill to our neighbour, and doing him all good, or the contrary? And will not the state of our life herein clearly prove the state of our heart? And as we are affected toward man, must we not be so affected toward God? And may not change be needful? Yes, I fear, in most cases. Let the present season then, the season of Christ's advent in the flesh, be the season of his advent in our hearts. "Let us put off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light." Let us cast aside our sinful covering, and "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." Trial is passing away; judgment and eternity are approaching. A year is about to close, and a year is about to begin. Let us "awake out of sleep;" seize the present opportunity; rejoice in the privileges still afforded to us; and pray that God's Holy Spirit may clothe us with his "armour of light," and give us grace and power to be daily more and more conformed, in love, to him who "loved us and gave himself for us¹."

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

THE EPISTLE. *Romans xv., 4 to 13.*

4 Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.

5 Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus:

6 That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

8 Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers:

9 And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.

10 And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.

11 And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people.

12 And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.

13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

The Scriptures were written for our learning; for the learning of all Christian people; but for the learning more especially

¹ Eph. v., 2.

of all who are striving to understand redeeming love, and to approve themselves as "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." In the Scriptures, as in a storehouse, are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" that the Lord hath laid up for his people. And to the Scriptures, as to a fund of inexhaustible supply, may each faithful or penitent servant of Christ repair for his spiritual equipment, and be replenished with the true riches. The learning that the worldly-minded prize, is the learning which gives them worldly wisdom, knowledge of arts and sciences, knowledge of human nature, ingenuity in a trade, skill in a profession. But Scriptural knowledge is a very different kind of knowledge, and this is seldom sought and rarely valued. It must even be forced upon hardened hearts; for it tells unwelcome truths, and warns of things to come. It threatens the hardened sinner, and would tear the worldling from the world. It reveals a God of justice, and demands conversion and change.

These lessons men might learn from the Scriptures, if they would only read them; but the doctrine the Scriptures teach is unpalatable, and they would rather risk the ruin of their souls, than be told what they cannot bear to hear. To men such as these, then, the Scriptures are a sealed book and unintelligible fable, and we have need to pray, that, ere it be too late, the delusion may pass away, and God be pleased to open their eyes, and dispose them to receive that ingrafted word which is able to save their souls. The Apostle here urges his doctrine under more hopeful circumstances. He addresses men, who, whatever were once their errors, are now believers; and refers them for a solution of certain difficulties, to "the things that were written aforetime." He tells them what these ancient writings say, with reference to the point under dispute, and proves most distinctly from thence, that Jewish and Gentile converts, forgetting all former differences, must become a united people in Christ; and having been both equally in error, must each make mutual concessions; and, in the spirit of the olden prophecy, "rejoice and glorify God together¹." And being full of zeal for the truth, he prays fervently, that "the God of patience and consolation" would grant unto all his people to be "likeminded," that is, kindly-affectioned one toward another, "according to Christ Jesus," and "with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The first practical inference to be drawn from this portion

¹ Ps. xviii., 49. Deut. xxxii., 43. Ps. cxvii., 1.

of Scripture, is, that Christians should live in peace. Whatever their provocations may be, however just their grounds of offence, however strong their passions, however opposite their interests, however wide apart their religious opinions, they should, as Christians, be peaceable, and as much as is possible, dwell together in unity. And, if on any pretext, or in any cause whatsoever, they are tempted to separate from their brethren, and to take or to give offence, they must immediately begin to suspect themselves, and fear lest the tempter may have gained an advantage of them, and have entangled them in some of his devices. Concord and brotherly affection were expected even of Gentile and Jewish converts, whose minds were not enlightened, as ours are, with a full knowledge of the truth. How much more then does it behove us, who have no such prejudices to overcome, but on the contrary, have high motives to encourage us, and "one Lord, one faith, one baptism", to set up as our common centre of union, to agree with our adversaries quickly, and "endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace"!

Further, we may learn patience and comfort from this portion of Scripture. The Scriptures were written with this one intent among many, that we, through the patience and comfort derived from their perusal, might have hope. Sickness, accident, misfortune, bereavement, befall us continually. Despondency sometimes assails us. Death is our bitterest enemy. Whither shall we flee from these troubles and expectations of troubles? To what place of consolation, to what asylum of refuge, shall we resort for deliverance? Can the world give us hope? Alas! it is vanity itself. Can the heart sustain its sorrow? No; it is weak as water. The Scriptures, yea, the Scriptures, these are the sure stays in our time of trouble. An atonement here revealed lifts up the drooping heart, revives the fainting spirit, encourages the hope nearly gone. It enlightens ignorance, re-assures despondency, opens a door to repentance, brightens even the darkness of the grave.

And he who made the atonement, how much does he teach and comfort us! and his words pervade the Scriptures. Observe him, the hope of the patriarchs, of the worthies, of the men of God. See him in the prophecies, note him in the types, remark him in the miracles, follow him in the ministry, read him in the Gospel, watch him on the cross; and then say, is he not all you wish, and all you need? Is he not the prophet, priest, and

¹ Eph. iv., 5.

² Eph. iv., 3.

king infallible, the anchor of all your hope, the refuge in all your necessity, your own mighty God, your omnipotent friend and Father, your victorious Prince of peace? And behold a Holy Spirit revealed in the Scriptures, who helps and teaches those for whom the Saviour thus atones. Behold him the strongest consolation in trouble, the chief confidence in prayer, the great hold in temptation, the mighty assurance unto the end. And does it not beget patience in adversity and comfort in affliction, to find the good evidence which is found in Scripture of the personality of Him of whom come these heavenly gifts? "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness; I will hold thine hand; I will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house¹." "Turn ye to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope²."

Lastly, all the things written aforetime having been written for our learning, we shall find it to be our duty as believers, to fulfil the divine intent herein, and read them daily. If we have the inclination to comply with the will of God, we shall not be without the desire to know it perfectly, to comprehend it fully, and to apply it practically; and as we do this, so shall we most certainly be either wise or foolish, careful or heedless, zealous or perverse, in the things that concern our salvation. Be it also remembered, that we cannot have the excuse of ignorance, if we are within reach of the Scriptures; that we cannot be beyond their reach, if we possess them; that none of us ought to be without them, if they may be purchased at a small cost³. Let us then read a portion of the Old or New Testament daily. Let us begin, if we have not begun already, to do this immediately. And if we have begun already, let us continue the work begun, for we surely have found it profitable. And let us read methodically, read regularly, read above all, with prayer. And he who inspired the Scriptures, and inspired them for our learning, he who imparts to them all their interest, and invites us to search them diligently, will imprint them indelibly on our souls, and "fulfil the good pleasure of his goodness therein, and the work of faith with power⁴."

¹ Isai. xlii., 6, 7.

² Zech. ix., 12.

³ A Bible may be obtained at any Christian Knowledge Depository for 1s. 6d.; a Testament for 6d.; and a Prayer Book for 6d.

⁴ 2 Thess. i., 11.

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

THE EPISTLE. 1 Cor. iv., 1 to 5.

LET a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self,

4 For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

It is justly due to the ministers of our Apostolical Church, that they should be accounted as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. They derive their commission through the Bishops that ordained them, through the Bishops of preceding ages, and finally through the Apostles, from Christ himself. Hence none can establish so high a claim to the ministerial office; none can be held to be so "truly called, sent, and chosen!" Greatly should they be revered and honoured by their people for their Master's and for their work's sake; for their Master is the Holy Saviour, and their work the salvation of souls. And yet it too often happens that in discharging their duties as servants of Christ, they are called to account by their people. They are thought to speak too boldly, too plainly—they are "judged of man's judgment." They are reprov'd for their reproof of sin. But this the Apostle strongly deprecates; and his admonition should not be unheeded. He tells us that a steward of the mysteries of God, that is, of his counsels and purposes once secret but now revealed, is to all intents and purposes a steward, and answerable to none but his Master. "It is a very small thing," says he, "that I should be judged of you or of man's judgment." A steward, that is, a man entrusted with the care, management, and distribution of his master's property, is accountable to his own master alone. And a steward of the mysteries of God is placed, as a steward, in the same position. It is required in all, but especially in such stewards, that a man be found faithful; and "he that judgeth them is the Lord." Since, then, the present is not the time, nor man the authority, to pass judgment upon the ministers of Christ, be it the aim of all members of their congregations to "take in good part their godly admonitions," and ever to respect

¹ Art. xxiii.

their office; and instead of deeming them worthy of blame for a faithful publication of the truth, thank them unceasingly for their zeal and diligence, and make better preparation in future for that fearful day of the Lord, which shall reveal faithfulness and unfaithfulness both in ministers and hearers, "bring to light all hidden things of darkness," make manifest the counsels of all hearts, and cause every man really faithful to have "praise of God."

Our services, as well as our ministers, are now reminding us of the approaching festival of Christ's Nativity, and of his second coming. Let not these seasonable warnings be altogether lost upon us, as though we were deaf, asleep, or inanimate, but let them receive, as they respectively occur, our promptest attention. The Epistle for the day shows us, in the first place, that the ministers set over us, are the ministers of him, whose nativity we shall presently celebrate. And who was he? Not a mere man, like ourselves; not an ordinary prophet, wise man, or scribe under the Jewish dispensation; not a worldly wise philosopher or uninspired legislator; but Christ, the Son of God; even God in the form of man. The Epistle shows us, further, the nature of the ministerial office, describing it as a stewardship or office of trust under Christ, and giving us to understand, that it must, as such, involve great responsibility and most diligent service.

The Epistle shows us once more, that the ministerial office, thus full of responsibility and constraining in obligation, concerns the destinies of man, and in its discharge encounters opposition. And the Epistle shows us finally, that the advent of Christ, the stewardship of his mysteries, and the destinies of man, as here set forth, all severally point to a final day of account, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and the issues of all destinies decided. How should this doctrine affect the ministers of Christ, and to what results, both in preaching and living, should it lead? It should gender great watchfulness. Prayer for increased steadfastness, habitual diligence, unwearied perseverance, should be the minister's frequent resort and main dependance. Knowledge should be acquired by study—self-examination should be frequent and unsparing—personal frailties should be searched out—faith should be ascertained—growth in grace should be the constant object of hope, exertion, and anxiety. And why should the minister of Christ be thus personally watchful? Because he is the minister of Christ, and

unless he sufficiently shows forth the power of the Gospel in his life, he cannot sufficiently exhibit it in his preaching.

And how should the responsibilities of ministers affect their preaching? Assured that they are responsible to a merciful but just Master; remembering that they are accountable for all the souls committed to them, and that for their fidelity, as stewards of that sacred trust, they must render an account in the day of judgment, they must take great heed unto their doctrine. They must preach the cross of Christ, and proclaim the fall of man. They must encourage the penitent to fulfil his repentance, and declare that "the wages of sin is death¹." They must point out the power of divine grace, the wiles of the devil, the rule of duty, the damnation of unbelievers. Nothing must be kept back; every thing must be made manifest. No class must be exempted from blame; no condition shut out from mercy. No time, no place, must be deemed unseasonable for these ministrations. By the way and in the house, as well as in the sanctuary and on the Sabbath, must words be spoken whereby we may be saved; words which must be heeded, for they are spoken with authority, even with authority given of God, and which man can neither give nor take away. Ministers may very possibly be poor, unknown, uninfluential, and even destitute of acuteness, worldly wisdom, and many outward qualifications, as compared with some of their people; but they have a commission not of this world, which places them far above any of them, yea above kings and princes, even the commission of "ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

Finally, does it seem irrelevant or inappropriate, that we who are not of the ministry, should understand its origin, nature, duties, obligations? Not at all, when the relative position in which we stand to it is considered; when it is considered, that we are the people to whom Christ's ministers are sent; that over us they are set, among us they minister, and for our souls they are accountable. How often is a minister set at naught, lightly esteemed, never heeded, never heard, disobeyed! How often is he even blamed for openly denouncing sin, boldly rebuking vice, freely speaking the truth, plainly delivering the message of his heavenly Master! These, then, are good reasons for making ourselves acquainted with the office and duty of a minister of Christ; an office and duty appertaining unto us, and imposing upon us manifold obligations in return. Gratitude is the least

¹ Rom. vi., 23.

return we can make for a care of us, love of us, solicitude for us thus unbounded; for so immense a responsibility incurred, so unceasing a diligence evinced in our behalf.

And oh, may we ever give heed to the ministry of our ministers, which will be the best return we can make them. And may we ever be led, by a merciful dispensation of the grace of God, to think well of them as ministers sent by him; to make allowance for their human infirmity; to reverence their office; never to blame them, slander them, thwart them; willingly to cooperate with them; greatly to love them; always to pray for them; readily to defend them; and most sincerely to desire their success. And is there not a day coming, when we shall greatly wish to have done all this, if we have not done it now? Oh yes, that day is indeed coming, yea, must speedily come, when every thing will be made manifest. The faithfulness or unfaithfulness of the minister; the obedience or disobedience of the people; the ministrations made effectual or ineffectual; the opportunities taken or not taken; the means of grace used or abused; all in that great day of Christ's second advent will be made manifest; and he alone who has been really faithful "will have praise of God."

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

THE EPISTLE. *Phil. iv., 4 to 7.*

4 Rejoice in the Lord alway: *and* again I say, Rejoice.

5 Let your moderation be known unto all men: The Lord is at hand.

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and suppli-

cation, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

There is no feature in the Gospel that so completely falls in with our wishes, adapts itself to our necessities, gains a hold on our affections, enlists our sympathies on its side, as its tendency to disperse all the mists and clouds of trouble. Without the Gospel, and without its great subject and author, man is ever in a state of doubt, fear, solicitude, disquietude. Trouble, his strongest enemy and most inveterate tormentor, is the parent of all his discomforts, and in its thousand shapes and forms, hems him in on every side. There is trouble from the cradle to the grave; trouble in every class and condition; trouble wherever there is life; trouble in mind as well as in body; trouble often springing up in joy. It was thus before the Gospel came,

and wheresoever the Gospel has not come, thus will it still continue. It is the destiny of man; the badge of his condition; the wages of his sin. And is it banished altogether even from Christian lands? Alas there, although in a very different form, it exists also, softened indeed and lightened, but not wholly subdued. In the heathen heart in a Christian land, it comes like the shock of an earthquake, tears up the foundation of peace altogether, lays the whole man prostrate, and overwhelms the stricken soul with a mighty desolation. Even over the heart in which the word has accomplished the Lord's pleasure, trouble will sometimes cast its shadow; but it will float there lightly like a summer-cloud. The whole horizon will be in other respects bright and clear; for there will have arisen upon it the full radiance of "a sun of righteousness, with healing in his wings¹."

And is all this theory, imagination, illusion? Oh no, it is fact; authenticated fact. The glorious Gospel of Christ fulfils its ancient promise in all that truly acknowledge it. It brings its good tidings of joy to "those that sit in darkness;" and wheresoever it is heartily welcomed, there is its promise fulfilled. Truly, most truly are these tidings, tidings of joy. Never had such interest been taken in man. A Saviour was indeed a cure for all ills. His presence dispersed the heavy clouds. Trouble in its worst form he conquered, and carried away captive. Trouble, indeed, in any form, he deprived of its sting. Our world of sorrow has become, wherever Christ is truly received, a world of joy, yea, even a heaven on earth.

And how does the Apostle exemplify this doctrine in the passage before us? He says first, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." As if he had said, "maintain an habitually happy frame of mind. Mind not whether tribulation, or vicissitude, or peril, or necessity, befall you. If you are true believers in Christ Jesus, you have that within you which gives you infinite support. You 'have all and abound' in his atonement, his Spirit, his word, his ability to save and strengthen you." Nay, more, you must take all your trials as proofs of a fatherly loving-kindness; as means of grace to your souls; as dispensations intended for your profit. And if, by God's grace, you are brought to think thus of your trials, you will certainly not only bear them patiently but joyfully; acknowledging them to be truly loving corrections and parental chastisements, and

¹ Mal. iv., 2.

rejoicing most unequivocally in the evidences they afford you of the infinite love of God.

We thus learn, that a well-founded trust in God through Christ is the most legitimate source of joy; and that the joy which thus "rejoices in the Lord," is never out of season. When the soul is overwhelmed with a temporal bereavement, or sunk in the very lowest depths of depravity and iniquity, then indeed is joy out of season. In the latter of these cases, indeed, there cannot be better evidence than sorrow, from whatever cause arising, of a return to a better frame of mind; and gladly should it be hailed, much should it be encouraged, as the germ of future fruit. And if this fruit come, if "tribulation," under the fostering influences of the Spirit "works patience, and patience experience, and experience hope," then may even this sorrow be turned into joy, and the soul repose in confidence on the omnipotent mercies of a Saviour, who brings good tidings of great joy to all, but especially to the penitent. The exhortation here given to "rejoice in the Lord alway," may not inappropriately bear reference, at the present time, to the approaching season of Christmas. It is a season (most justly) of great joy. But does it not derive its character from its connexion with our soul's salvation? With what then should its joy be conversant? How should it show itself? Of what sort should it be? It should be, as much as in us lies, calm, devotional, reverential, spiritual, heavenly; not boisterous, not frivolous, not indiscreet, not in any point of view unbecoming; but devoted chiefly to a contemplation of those great and glorious objects, for which a Saviour came into the world.

The Apostle says, secondly, "Let your moderation be known unto all men: The Lord is at hand." Men are born by nature with violent passions, which often disturb their peace, and affect the peace of society. How often is this violence visible in the little affairs of daily life! People imagine themselves insulted or wronged, and when once the idea gains possession of them, nothing can dislodge it from their minds. And so without inquiry, without reflection, without desire for explanation of any kind, they pour forth a torrent of abuse, and condemn without sense or reason. What interruption is this of a friendship, an affection, a good understanding; of the harmony of a neighbourhood, community, or family! "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth¹." But the gentleness or moderation engendered

¹ James iii., 5.

by Christianity "is not easily provoked¹," and takes all things patiently. Taught of God to regard even the heaviest afflictions as light, it can easily support life's lesser vexations with composure. And it is incumbent upon him who is really a believer in Christ, nay, it is his most glorious privilege, thus to crucify the whole body of sin; thus to make the Gospel a fund of comfort; thus to turn evil into good, and to live as becomes his high and holy faith. And he has a joy, which may well make amends for any trouble. "The Lord is at hand" to see his inward struggles. "The Lord is at hand" to strengthen his purposes of endurance. "The Lord is at hand" to bless and finally glorify his patient and self-denying spirit.

But once more, there are not only grievous tribulations wherein we may rejoice, and light provocations wherein we may practise forbearance, but ordinary occasions wherein we may show equanimity. The Apostle says, "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Distrust of a wise and overruling Providence is a failing which exists to a much greater extent than we imagine among true believers; that sort of distrust, I mean, which is implied in overmuch anxiety, occasional murmurs, a keen sense of temporal disappointment, a mournful depression under worldly vicissitude. Why should a man who in sincerity acknowledges a Saviour be thus distrustful? Why should such a man bestow much more thought upon his own ability to get wealth than upon the divine power to provide, a power which he professes to acknowledge in prayer, and invokes because he thinks it can supply the need? Why should he, a believer in that atonement which supplies man's greatest need, dissipates his heaviest perplexities, brings him his tidings of truest joy, display such very marked concern about things of but little moment? Is it not too like a withdrawal of solicitude from things spiritual, to fix it upon things temporal? Does he forget that he should not be thus thoughtful above measure for the morrow, thus careful and troubled about many things, thus worldly-minded, thus impatient, but "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness²," and for everything really necessary, "by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make known his request unto God?" The experience he has had of the divine goodness in the care of his immortal soul must assure him, that everything intrinsically good and excel-

¹ 1 Cor. xiii., 5.

² Matt. vi., 33.

lent does come from God, through that Mediator who has already died for his sins, and would save him from every other real ill besides. And if he will only faithfully act upon this experience, and pray in spirit and in truth, when encompassed with temporal calamity, to him who has done so much for him and can do more, his prayer will certainly be heard. God will give him what is needful, raise him up friends, find him ways and means. Or, if it be more in accordance with the divine will, to try his faith, and to try it by delay, he will give him in due time, and in answer to frequent prayer, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding," and this shall "keep his heart and mind through Christ Jesus."

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD OR THE BIRTH-DAY OF CHRIST, COMMONLY CALLED CHRISTMAS DAY.

THE EPISTLE. *Heb. i., 1 to 12.*

GOD, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,

2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his Son*, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

4 Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

5 For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?

6 And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world,

he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.

7 And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.

8 But unto the Son *he saith*, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

9 Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, *even thy God*, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

10 And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands:

11 They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment;

12 And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

There cannot be a more seasonable doctrine on this day, than the doctrine of its appointed Epistle. The Incarnation of Christ naturally fixes our thoughts on his humanity, and draws our attention to what he did, said, and suffered, as man. We

find him, on this day especially, "in fashion as a man," and naturally expect to see him, as such, "tempted in all points like as we are" in his after life. We behold him, on this day especially, made in our likeness; and we naturally look upon him as one, who "must be touched with a feeling of our infirmities," and be "able to succour them that are tempted."

But lest our minds should be so entirely taken up with these considerations, as to become thereby forgetful of other equally prominent features in the office and attributes of Jesus, the Church wisely makes choice of a portion of Scripture, on the day of his nativity, which most strongly illustrates his divinity. And first, he is called "the Son of God," which is the most sublime, the most divine, the most truly glorious, of all titles. If he were proved to be the Son of God, even the Jews, his old enemies, declared their readiness to acknowledge him; to acknowledge him as equal with God¹. And that he can be so proved, every page of Scripture and every conclusion of reason verifies beyond a doubt. But here, in particular, it is said, that "by him God made the world," that he "upholds all things with the word of his power," is "set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high," is "made much better than the angels," is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person." And it is said also, that "his throne is for ever and ever," that "worship is due to him from the angels," and that though the earth may perish and the heavens wax old, he is "the same, and his years shall not fail."

These are the terms made use of, (and they are many and of the most forcible kind,) to express the divinity of the Saviour, and by him, such as he is here declared to be, God has "in these last days" spoken. God has spoken to us by *his Son*. He has then spoken to us by *himself*. Can we turn a deaf ear to a voice from heaven? Can we turn away from him, who, under such peculiar circumstances, and through such a peculiar channel, vouchsafes to speak unto us? Can he not, the great and mighty God, as readily turn man to destruction, as save his soul alive? Can he not speak as terribly in his holiness, as speak mildly in his mercy? "What am I," should not each of us at once say, "that I can withstand such a God; presume to oppose his will by continuing in sin; dare to thwart his purposes by habitually grieving, quenching, and doing despite to his Spirit?" Is there a sinner amongst us, who, by a constant course of open sin, is in the daily

¹ Heb. iv, 15.² Heb. ii, 18.³ John v, 18.

habit of opposing and exalting himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped? If there is, let him hear the voice of a sin-hating God, and fear. Let him hear the voice which saith, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man¹." Let him hear the voice which saith, "God is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said and shall he not do it? And hath he spoken and shall he not make it good²?"

But God has spoken in tones of mercy. He is a God of love, yea, love itself, even "full of compassion and mercy, longsuffering, and of great goodness³." How condescending is it in God to speak to man as a friend; to expostulate with him, reason with him, wait his time, give him opportunity! Can the sinner resist his touching appeal? Can the wavering hesitate? Can the penitent relapse? Nay, can any that have tasted of his grace repent the step he has taken, and stop short in his onward career? Oh, no, God, not man, has persuaded him; "he who speaks in righteousness, and is mighty to save⁴."

But, secondly, God, this benign, this gracious, this omnipotent, this reconciled God, hath spoken unto *us*! And we, whom he hath spoken unto, who are we? Worthy in any wise of such particular notice, such especial condescension? Impossible. We are weak, wicked, fallen, degraded creatures, and he is infinitely holy, infinitely good. "He is in heaven, and we on earth⁵." He is a Spirit, and we are flesh. He is the Creator, and we the creatures. And yet this Lord of Heaven, this Eternal Spirit, this great Creator, this "High and Holy One that inhabits eternity," disdains not to hold communication with "man whom he has formed," with man who is his enemy, and mocks him to his face. Oh, astonishing grace, adorable love, unparalleled condescension! Behold him speaking to Abraham, to Moses, to the Prophets. Behold him addressing a nation. Behold him conferring with a world. Hear him in his word, feel him in your hearts. Observe him reasoning, watch him expostulating; give heed to him promising, threatening, beseeching, admonishing; and then say, whether it is not really true, to your own everlasting content and joy, that God doth indeed "talk to man and he liveth⁶."

But, finally, although God himself hath in very deed spoken unto us, he hath spoken unto us BY HIS SON. Love, mercy, peace, grace, forgiveness, salvation, all are included in that one title, the Son of God. If God had spoken to us in all his omni-

¹ Gen. vi., 3.² Numb. xxiii., 19.³ Ps. lxxxvi., 15.⁴ Isai. lxiii., 1.⁵ Eccl. v., 2.⁶ Deut. v., 24.

potence and all his majesty, coming, as he shall some time come, with power and great glory, "making the clouds his chariot and walking upon the wings of the wind;" then indeed might man be affrighted, for he could never have seen him and live. But thanks to the infinite wisdom and pity of him who accomplished redemption, he hath spoken to us as God, and yet spoken in the form of man. Offended, justly offended as he was with man—and sinner, truly grievous sinner as man was—he not only condescended to speak to man, but to take his form and likeness, and "being found in fashion as a man," to become eventually "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross¹."

"Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will toward men," these were to be the results, sang the heavenly choir, of the appearance of a Saviour on earth². And truly does it picture his mission, not indeed as it invariably or universally is, but as it should always be found, and as it does sometimes appear. He came to speak to us on a subject that concerned our own happiness, our own eternal, unspeakable happiness. And he came to tell us that he could restore it, bring back the long-lost days of Paradise, make reconciliation between the offended God and the offending creature, change the corrupt heart, comfort the mourning spirit, teach the lesson of holiness, and bring the returning prodigal within the hope, the light, the sound, the fruition of salvation. And how has he done this? He has left us his word, whereby we may be taught, his ministry, whereby we may be admonished, his Spirit, wherewith we may be assisted "how we ought to walk and to please God." "He has left us an example, that we should follow his steps³." He has left us a day, on which to remember him, a place in which to serve him. All these things he has left us; but, above all things, he has left us, as the most precious legacy he could possibly bequeath, his death upon the cross; the death by which he has ransomed sinners, and "opened unto us the gates of everlasting life." And this is the day, on which he first, in his incarnate form, appeared on earth. And wherewith do we now celebrate it? Not, it is to be hoped, with superabundant company, unusual merriment, immoderate feasting; but with sober, temperate, spiritual joy, "serving the Lord with fear, and rejoicing unto him with reverence⁴," and, above all, listening with the most fervent faith and the most devout attention to the precious words that

¹ Philip. ii., 8.

² 1 Pet. ii., 21.

³ Luke ii., 14.

⁴ Ps. ii., 11.

proceed out of his mouth, which still offer forgiveness, still offer righteousness, still offer a new heart and a new spirit, to every lost sheep that wanders from the fold.

SAINT STEPHEN'S DAY.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Acts vii., 55 to 60.*

55 Stephen, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen, whose martyrdom we this day commemorate, was distinguished for his extraordinary faith, and those gifts of the Holy Ghost, through which he was enabled to work miracles, make converts, and silence gainsayers. Abundant, however, as was the life of this eminent saint in evidences of faith and holy inspiration, yet did his death, and some of the circumstances attending it, afford still more signal tokens of grace not in vain, and faith great beyond measure, of grace that triumphed over natural infirmity, and faith that worked mightily by love. Even in the awful hour of his martyrdom, this faithful servant of Christ could still be "full of the Holy Ghost," and of faith, and of charity. And in the midst of all his persecutions and afflictions, he could still, with the eye of faith, "look up stedfastly into heaven and see the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." He could still "love, bless, and forgive his persecutors," and pray fervently, that "the Lord would not lay the sin they were committing, to their charge."

This example may be instructive at all times, but especially in times of tribulation. Those who are in the daily habit of enduring patiently much suffering and privation, spiritual and temporal, may take courage from the martyr's history, and be assured that, though there may be much to be borne by Christ's disciples, there can never be too much, with the help of God, to be borne patiently. Those, whose faith is strong, may dwell exultingly on that holy faith of the martyr Stephen, which, in a

fixed contemplation of "things above," could thoroughly despise "things on the earth;" could look up steadfastly unto a heavenly friend through the darkness of an earthly trial, and "fear not those that could kill the body, but only him who could destroy the soul." And those whose meekness and charity is on the increase, may dwell exultingly on the meekness and charity of him, who, as sufferings increased, could pray more and more ardently for his persecutors, and at a time, when his enemies were devising against him cruelties innumerable, was ready to repay their malevolence with prayers for their conversion. Those, however, whose patience is as yet not great, their faith not strong, their charity not overflowing, may learn from this history the true mode of obtaining the spiritual gifts they need; may learn that they are necessary to salvation, and not unattainable.

In the family, more especially, must faith be set forth for an example, and patience and charity be exercised. A family is a little world in itself, where every good gift we possess will be put to daily proof, and every evil propensity drawn forth. In a family, as well as elsewhere, temptations abound, and trials occur continually, sin, more or less, has dominion, provocations are unceasing, and few there be, comparatively, that "walk in the narrow way that leads to everlasting life." Sometimes does it indeed happen, but rarely, that a family, as a whole, is "holiness unto the Lord;" and, oh! how spiritually bright is the place of its habitation! Like Goshen in the land of Egypt, there is light in that fair place. While all around is darkness; while an evil world, full of corruption and iniquity, envelopes the pathway of the penitent, and the course of the true believer, with obstructions and gloom; here does the brightness of "the Gospel of peace" shine with unclouded effulgence, and afford "a light to the feet and a lamp to the paths" of all that walk therein.

If such be really the case amongst us who are here present, let us take heed individually, as well as collectively, not to fall short of our profession in the world without. Our walk must needs be in the world; but let us walk with vigilance, with purity of heart, with holy fear. Let us go on our way, praying; let us pray while we go, watching; and Christ, besought in faith, will give the light, give the increase, give the blessing.

But if, on the contrary, it must in truth be said of us, that as a family, we are not of the true fold; then must there be a sore trial for each of us to undergo, before we can attain unto

Stephen's perfectness. There will be impediments to a first attainment of faith, patience, and charity—impediments to their progress, if they have already taken root—and most trying tests of their stability, if they have reached a certain ripeness and perfectness. And, happy will it indeed be for us, if we can only feel, that, under any circumstances, we need never depend on ourselves, but may always look up for help; that we may have the glory of God for a prize; and the Son of Man on his right hand for a friend; that we may have One on our side who will sustain us in life, and in death receive our spirit. There is not, indeed, in these days any danger of martyrdom. Christian principles may be professed, practised, and gloried in; and no bodily peril can ensue.

But there are many other circumstances of a trying character, with which we are continually surrounded, and these must be met in a Christian spirit. And no easy task will it be to meet them thus. Pride will be the chief obstacle. Worldliness, self-love, uncharitableness, unbelief, will also offer opposition. There will be persecution, but it will be spiritual; danger, but not to the body; enemies, but not carnal. The soul may be almost overpowered. It may even be wholly overcome; crushed under the weight of its temptations; deprived for a season of all spiritual life. But there will be the motives I have already named to cheer it up; and as they enabled Stephen to conquer, so will they enable all other believers to return to the contest with courage, "fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life."

And thankful, truly thankful should we be, that our lot was not cast in Stephen's times, and that, without any peril to the body, we can bestow all attention on the soul. The soul must have its dangers—its trials—its enemies—and sanctify and purify it as by the grace of God we may, we cannot exempt it from suffering. Suffering is man's appointed trial, and suffer he must, whether he be a servant of Christ, or a child of the devil. But his suffering is his Father's chastisement, if he is a servant of Christ; and, if he meets it with the mind of Stephen, it will draw forth and prove his patience.

But it should never be forgotten, that the meekness and spirituality of this blessed martyr was accompanied with boldness and courage. He was ready to suffer for the truth, but he was determined to defend it. With his dying breath he could pray for his enemies, but with his dying breath he must confess

his Saviour. We shall never be required to suffer for the truth. We shall never be subjected to the horrors of death by stoning. But happy will it be for us, if we can bear our comparatively light afflictions with equal patience, pray for all that hate us with equal charity, believe in Him who saveth us with equal courage, and pass through life, amid great discouragements, with the same zeal for the glory of God; happier still if we are enabled at last to meet death, the accustomed quiet death of all men, not only without fear but with rejoicing; assured of peace at the last, and expecting the glory that shall follow.

SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST'S DAY.

THE EPISTLE. I *St. John* i., 1 to the end.

THAT which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;

2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)

3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare

unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

St. John, the beloved and inspired Apostle of Christ, here tells us, in the plainest terms, that he was an eye-witness and ear-witness of the truths he advanced—truths which concerned the infinite holiness, purity, and knowledge of God—truths clear as the light, and clouded with no darkness at all. That God, the original depository of the treasure of eternal life, should be declared, on such high authority, to be essentially light, and to have in him no darkness at all, must encourage every true believer and every believer whatsoever, to hold close communion with him, to depend on him implicitly for every thing, and

rejoice in the assurance, not only of communion with the Father; but with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Every promise of him who is truth itself, every doctrine of him who is knowledge itself, every attribute of him who is holiness itself, must take a character of stability and eternity from its prime source, and impart a like character to the faith grounded on it.

We must not, however, be deluded with the notion, that we "have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," merely because we are satisfied with the evidences of Christianity. "Ordered in all things and sure" as is "the eternal life which was with the Father, and has been manifested unto us," because depending on him who is "light, and in whom is no darkness at all," yet is there a test of real fellowship with the Father, which all must have to be saved; and the Apostle here makes known to us, "If we say that we have fellowship, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

It is necessary, then, that each individual amongst us should ask himself, what at present is his spiritual condition. And let him try himself by this test. Let him ask himself, whether, as respects some particular sin, he is not at present "walking in darkness." And let him ask himself, whether, as respects the general tenour of his life and conversation, he is not at present "walking in darkness." And let not his *profession* deceive him. Let him not think, because he holds outward communion with his Father in prayer, that he is therefore necessarily, to all intents and purposes, in true spiritual communion with him. But let him rather ask himself, what is his walk? Is his walk spiritual? Is his walk conformable to the word of life? Is his walk holy, pious, sober, temperate? Is his walk, in a word, "in the light, as God is in the light?" Or, on the other hand, is his walk not spiritual, not conformable to the Gospel, not holy, pious, sober, temperate, in a word, not in the light, but in darkness? Let him ask himself each of these questions in turn, and may the Lord give him grace to meditate on them fully, and answer them aright.

As his prayer is, so will his walk be. If his prayer is formal, his walk will be carnal. If his prayer is spiritual, his walk will be spiritual. Real communion with God is communion

¹ 2 Sam. xxiii, 5.

with him in every thing; as also saith another Apostle, "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or, what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" Wherefore, saith he, emphatically, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty".

But in particular be it remembered, that one of the signs of fellowship with the Father, and of walking in the light, is "fellowship one with another." Look at the Apostle himself. He had fellowship with his heavenly Master in greater measure than any other disciple, and yet also had he fellowship with all the believers. And note the general tenour of his epistles. They all breathe love, unbounded love, for those that had "obtained with him like precious faith." They all inculcate love as a duty, a test of faith, a token of discipleship; love to God, love to man, "fellowship with the Father, and with Jesus Christ," fellowship with the brethren, and with all the world.

And how does each individual amongst us find himself situated in this respect? Is he in fellowship, true fellowship with his brethren? Is he in fellowship, true fellowship with all amongst whom he sojourns? But how shall he know this? By an easy practical proof. If he quarrels with his brethren, does them injury, overreaches them, bears them malice, slanders them, despises them, forbears to serve them, then he is not in fellowship with them. On the contrary, if he neither gives provocation, nor yields to it; if he never serves himself at another's expense; if he often serves another to his own hurt; if he uniformly thinks the best he can of all; if he never intentionally harms his brethren; if he continually commends a good work, be the doer of it who he may; if he more especially strives to promote in others, and exemplify in himself, the blessed virtue of unity, unity in faith, unity in doctrine, unity in worship, unity in practice;—then has he, upon the clearest principles of reasoning, fellowship with those in whose service he labours.

¹ Compare this with 1 Sam. v., 2, 3; 1 Kings xviii., 21; and Ecclus. xiii., 17.

² Compare this with Isai. lii., 11; Rev. xviii., 4; Jer. xxxi., 1—9; Rev. xxi., 7.

And surely this fellowship with one another, if it be founded on its legitimate groundwork, has sprung from fellowship with God. And surely where this fellowship does not exist, there can be no true fellowship with God. Let us beware of deceiving ourselves on this point. Self-love will whisper some plea of extenuation, suggest good intentions, and shrink from inquiry. But that eternal word of life "which we have heard from the beginning, seen with our eyes, and handled without hands," will still thunder in our ears the unwelcome tidings, "If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth;" and the same Scripture encourages us with the assurance, that if we are willing to strive to live as becometh the Gospel, and "walk in the light as he is in the light," "we have fellowship one with another," and "the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all sin."

Another question that he who watches for his soul may fairly put to himself, is, how he feels towards sin? Does he confess it, or does he not confess it? If he confesses it, he has all the privileges of discipleship open to him. God is "faithful and just to forgive him his sins, and to cleanse him from all unrighteousness." If he does not confess it, then does he "deceive himself;" "the truth is not in him;" he "makes God a liar;" and the word of God is not in his heart. It is a fearful thing to "say that we have no sin;" and yet how many of us in effect, or by implication, really say so. The ignorant man "says that he has no sin," because he knows not what sin is. The moral man "says that he has no sin," because he holds that virtue has only to do with morals, and not with faith. The self-righteous man "says that he has no sin," because he imagines that the Spirit of God is in him, and that having this Spirit of God in him, he must necessarily, without any effort on his part, be kept from all evil. To such and all such it must be said, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall¹." Let him that "thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing," no longer "deceive himself²." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and unto our God, for he will abundantly pardon³."

¹ 1 Cor. x., 12.² Gal. vi., 3.³ Isai. lv., 7.

THE INNOCENTS' DAY.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Rev. xiv. 1 to 5.*

AND I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the Mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

2 And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:

3 And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders; and no man could learn

that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

4 These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, *being* the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb.

5 And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.

The Holy Innocents were, in a certain sense, "the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb." They were the first that literally died in the cause of Christ. They were the first that shed their blood, although unconsciously, for his namesake. True, they were not, like Stephen and those ordinarily called martyrs, self-offered victims, persons who, "for the word of truth and for the testimony they held¹," willingly offered themselves unto death. They were not like those, who, after having arrived at years of discretion, and "having their senses exercised to discern good and evil²," deliberately embrace a perilous service, and persevere in it at all hazards, and with their eyes open. No; but they were victims, pure, without spot, and well-pleasing to God, and victims in a cause of faith and holiness, victims in whom was no sin except that of nature, in "whose mouth was found no guile," and who were "without fault before the throne of God."

Rightly then did the compilers of our Liturgy judge, that the first which suffered for Christ, although unconsciously, should be remembered with honour for ever. Rightly did they also judge, that on the festival thus instituted in honour of the Holy Innocents, a portion of Scripture should be read which describes the happiness of the blessed, of those of the blessed more especially, who were "first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb."

And what will this Scripture, in conjunction with the festival, teach us? It will teach us, first, that man can never disappoint the purposes of God. It was the object of Herod, in destroying the Innocents, to destroy Jesus. But warning was

¹ Rev. vi., 9.

² Heb. v., 14.

given by God, and Jesus was conveyed to a place of safety, the Innocents had an early and sure entrance into the realms of glory, an ancient prophecy was literally fulfilled¹, and the fugitive infant lived to be the Saviour of the world. Man, then, we see can never disappoint the purposes of God. Strive though he may, and strive with the arm of authority, the craft of cunning, the agency of ministers of his will, he must ever, if God be against him, yield the victory to God.

And how shall we spiritualize this truth? Let us begin by asking ourselves, whether we ever make an effort to disappoint the divine purposes? Yes, too often. We often set up our own wills in opposition to the will of God. We sometimes corrupt one another by a bad example. We occasionally persecute those who are doing their best to love and please God. It is thus that we attempt to disappoint the divine purposes. But can we ever expect these efforts to succeed? Oh, no! God will bring to nought our best laid schemes of opposition to his will. He will thwart us in a thousand ways. He will make his omnipotent grace to abound to our sore discomfiture and amazement. He will turn us whithersoever he will "with his mighty hand and stretched-out arm". He will bring us down to the gates of the grave. He will make the cause of himself and of his persecuted people to triumph. Glory shall be his. Self-abasement shall be ours. Peace shall be the portion of the sanctified. Misery, disappointment, nay hell, the inheritance of the gainsayers. And should we not pray that God would be pleased to deliver us from this evil? Should we not pray that God would speedily cause his will to triumph over ours, turn our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, and "cast down imaginations and every high thing within us that exalts itself against the knowledge of God". Oh! let us strive and pray, and then will he turn and answer.

But, secondly, this portion of Scripture hints to us who are the best prepared for heaven. And these, it implies, are children, and all of tender years who have not been defiled with sin. What does the Saviour himself admonish concerning children? "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in

¹ Compare Hos. xi., 1, with Matt. ii., 15.

² Deut. v., 15.

³ 2 Cor. x., 5.

his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them¹." "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven²." A childlike disposition, then, is the disposition most meet for the kingdom of God; the disposition, in fact, without which we cannot possibly enter it, either in the sense of true conversion, or final salvation. A childlike disposition is an humble disposition, a trusting disposition, a tractable disposition, a disposition free from wilful sin, and untainted with worldly pollution. It is the disposition of very young children, of those who have not lived as many months as some have years, and are as unpractised in the ways of the world as in the devices and desires, yet to be developed, of their own hearts. This is the disposition inculcated on the Christian as his truest spiritual ornament, and best qualification for heaven. Thus arrayed, he will be "a vessel unto honour, meet for the master's use;" qualified for discipleship; furnished for immortality; the lowest in his own estimation; the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Not prepared thus, not disposed thus, not watching thus, not living thus, he will not be a recognized disciple of Christ, not deemed meet for spiritual privileges, but rather be deemed an "alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world³."

But ought we not to live unto God? Should we not make it the chief object of our ambition to believe unto salvation; to do the work given us to do; to "gird up the loins of our mind⁴;" to "labour for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life⁵?" Necessity is indeed imposed upon us, yea, upon all of us, to take this advantage of present privileges, and thus to watch, thus to desire renovation, thus to make all things new. Perchance we do not think thus at present. If so, there must be self-examination; self-examination will soon show us what we are, and what we ought to be. And then let contrition, self-abasement, self-condemnation follow. And let not the soul be content until it be fashioned like unto Christ; until it has "behaved and quieted itself as a child that is weaned from his mother, yea, has made itself as a weaned child⁶."

Finally, we are taught in this Scripture, indirectly, the great

¹ Mark x., 14, 15, 16.

² Matt. xviii., 3, 4.

³ Eph., ii., 12.

⁴ 1 Pet. i., 13.

⁵ John vi., 27.

⁶ Ps. cxxxi., 2.

importance of educating children. If children, just fresh from their Maker's hands, are, comparatively speaking, innocent, and yet often grow up in after life to be hardened sinners, should not advantage be always taken of the capabilities of childhood, and children be invariably taught by those who have the charge of them, "so soon as they shall be able to learn, what a solemn vow, promise, and profession," has been made in former times in their behalf¹?

In particular, are any of us godfathers and godmothers? If so, let us take the present opportunity of calling to mind a trust perchance much neglected and long forgotten. Let us return, if possible, even thus late, to the fulfilment of it, never again abuse it thus, and implore the Lord to pardon the omission. Let us examine our godchild with care, and see what his faith, knowledge, practice, opportunities, are. Let us teach him if we be able; pray for him if it be necessary; and so guide and warn him, that he may be established in truth for ever.

Are any of us teachers in a school? If we are, how do we perform our duties? Do we feel the responsibility of our situation? Do we look upon ourselves as "stewards of the manifold grace of God?" Do we enter on our task and go on with it under a deep sense of the obligation we are under to keep the innocent child still innocent, show him his proneness to sin, and his need of a Saviour, and sow in him the seeds that shall ripen unto everlasting life. Oh! let us do thus, and we shall be fellow-labourers with God, ministers of his grace, workers that shall be blessed in our deed.

And finally, are any of us parents? If so, we are bound, notwithstanding the responsibilities of godparents, teachers, ministers, to look well to the ways of our children, to show them, both by example and precept, the thing that is right, and to turn in the right direction the steps that have just entered on the path of life. "In the morning sow thy seed, in the evening withhold not thy hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good²."

¹ Baptismal Service.

² 1. Pet. iv., 10.

³ Eccles. xi., 6.

THE SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY.

THE EPISTLE. *Gal. iv. 1 to 7.*

NOW I say, *That* the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all:

2 But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his

Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

The Apostle here draws a comparison between the minority of an heir to a great worldly estate, and the minority of man in his spiritual character. The heir to a great worldly estate, "as long as he is a child," "is under tutors and governors, until the time appointed of the father," and when that time comes he takes possession. So also were those Jews, in a spiritual sense, children, who, before they embraced the Gospel, "were in bondage under the elements of the world," which taught but the beginnings of knowledge. But when the fulness of the time was come in which this spiritual minority should cease, "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem all Jews that were under the law," as well as all Gentiles that were in a state of still more abject bondage, that all might "receive the adoption of sons." And as the inheritance of a worldly heir is a great worldly estate, with all its profits and privileges, so is the spiritual inheritance of the adopted child of God a rich, heavenly possession; an entrance of the Spirit of God into the heart; and an entrance of the spiritually-minded disciple, after death, into the presence of his God.

It appears, then, from the Epistle for the day, that the spiritual minority of man did, as at this time, cease; and that to the Son of God, sent, as at this time, to terminate his spiritual minority, the glory of the great deliverance is due.

"The time appointed of the Father" for this glorious consummation, was the time of Jesus Christ's appearance. The Jews before this were "under tutors and governors," and these tutors and governors were their rites and ceremonies, their statutes and sacrifices, which taught them certain rudiments of heavenly knowledge; kept them under strict discipline; and gave them a

shadowy outline of many good and spiritual things to come. The Gentiles, equally with the Jews the intended heirs of the promise, were involved in still greater spiritual darkness; were in much more abject "bondage under the elements of the world;" and though heirs of a most glorious inheritance, were slaves, servile slaves, to their own hearts' lusts. But the time of the termination of the minority drew on, and at last came fully to pass. Christ was revealed the hope of glory. "To them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light did spring up¹." "The darkness had covered the earth, and gross darkness the people;" but "the Lord arose upon them, and his glory was seen upon them²;" "a light that lightened the Gentiles, and the glory of God's people Israel³."

Be it then a subject of pious joy, of grateful recollection, in every family, that the worldly elements of the Law and the darkness of Gentile ignorance have now passed away, and that grace and truth have been established by Jesus Christ. No longer does "a law of commandments contained in ordinances⁴," no longer does a burden of obedience impossible, no longer does a bondage of sin unatoned, press heavily on the conscience, and harass it with misgiving. No longer is man without a knowledge of God, without means of grace, and without hopes of glory. No. A new law, a new sacrifice, a new system of rites and ceremonies have now arisen, and that which was liable to decay and perversion has at length vanished away. The Mediator of this better covenant, made in the likeness of sinful flesh, has now gone forth; furnished with his more excellent ministry and better covenant, offering us his easier yoke and lighter burden, and declaring his readiness to "loose the bands of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke⁵."

And we are the slaves set free; we are among the children made heirs; we are among the sojourners in a strange country, privileged to walk at liberty, taste of the heavenly gift, and find the way that leads to everlasting life. As such, let us rejoice in our inheritance, live as becometh servants and children largely benefited at present and expecting to be still more largely benefited hereafter, and behave in our new character and in our several vocations, as we ought. Disobedience is sin; lack of love is sin; lack of faith is sin; dissension and discord are con-

¹ Compare Isai. ix., 2, with Matt. iv., 16.

³ Luke ii., 32.

⁴ Eph. ii., 15.

² Isai. lx., 1, 2.

⁵ Jerem. lvi., 6.

trary to the Gospel doctrine. Faith must work by love; love must keep the commandments; the commandments are joyous and not grievous; and obedience to the commandments, on a principle of faith and in a spirit of love, is the sum and substance of Christian duty.

Be it our part to be of the number of those, who are "no more servants but sons, and if sons, then heirs of God through Christ." Be it our part to be of the number of those, who are really redeemed from under the law, and have savingly received the adoption of sons. Be it our part to be of the number of those, who are no longer children, but mature in years, no longer "under tutors and governors," but in full enjoyment of their inheritance. Be it our part to be of the number of those, into whose hearts the Spirit of God is sent, and in whose hearts the Spirit of God remains; sons that bespeak their adoption, by assimilation to their Father.

But let us beware of mistaking our position. We are not children or sons of God, merely because we have received baptism. We are not children or sons of God, merely because we make profession of faith in Christ. They that would "live in the Spirit, must walk in the Spirit¹."

Is this our plan, or is it not? Do we resort to the means of grace, and do we make them the means of grace? Is the Bible read, the minister heard, the church frequented, the conscience consulted, the Lord invoked; and all for grace, for more grace, for greater grace, for unceasing grace? Or are none of these things done, nay, not even attempted? And what is our walk, both individually and relatively? Does it promote the glory of God, or proclaim our own shame? Does it "show out of a good conversation our works with meekness of wisdom²," or, does it exhibit pride, vain-glory, contention, covetousness? Does it abound in love to God and in love to man, or in professions of both, but in fruits of neither? Does it perfect in us repentance and amendment of life, or prove us to be backsliding sinners and incorrigible transgressors? We must be already quite aware of our state, if we will only ask ourselves. We know what we are. Do we remember what we ought to be?

The earthly heir is sometimes deprived of his inheritance for disobedience. So may the heir of an everlasting inheritance. He is receiving now all the favours and privileges, which in a family are a sort of first portion of a child's inheritance. The

¹ Gal. v., 25.

² James iii., 13

last portion that falls to him is the best, but cannot be obtained if the first has not been put to the intended use. Be it our care so to walk now in the Spirit, that we be not, in the worst of all senses, disinherited. Let us live, let us act, as children of God. Let us love him, who first loved us. Let us love one another for his sake. Let us be, in every sense, as children and brethren in a united family; animated with one spirit, actuated by one motive, the hope of eternal life, even that eternal life which came by Jesus Christ, is allotted to all true believers, and shall be enjoyed in the heaven of heavens.

THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST.

THE EPISTLE. *Rom. iv., 8 to 14.*

8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

9 *Cometh* this blessedness then upon the circumcision *only*, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.

10 How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had yet* being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not

circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision *only*, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which *he had* being *yet* uncircumcised.

13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, *was* not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

14 For if they which are of the law *be* heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.

The words with which the Epistle for the day opens, are taken from the psalms of David¹, and are quoted as illustrative of an argument. The Apostle had been showing that Abraham's faith was imputed unto him for righteousness; and that ours, by consequence, might in like manner be imputed. It was thus, he says, that David argued. David described the blessedness of the man to whom God imputed righteousness without works. And of what man did David thus speak? Not of him who was of the circumcision only, but of him also who "walked in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised."

And why must this have been the case? Because, when

¹ Ps. xxxii., 2.

Abraham was not in circumcision but in uncircumcision, his faith was reckoned unto him for righteousness¹. And thus every believer, who believes after the fashion of Abraham's belief, may feel assured, that he is "blessed with faithful Abraham²," that he is among "the blessed unto whom the Lord will not impute sin." In the Apostle's day the rite of circumcision had ceased to be binding, but still the Jews and judaizing Christians adhered to it with unabated tenacity. The Jews had ceased to be, in any sense, the peculiar people of God, but they nevertheless contended, that they, as the children of Abraham, were the covenanted heirs of the promise. This made it necessary for the Apostle to take frequent opportunities of condemning their unscriptural assumption of peculiar privileges, of disproving the everlasting obligation of their rites, and laying open the distinctive features of that new faith, through which they and all families of the earth would be blessed. He takes one of these opportunities here; and, in doing so, affords us the means of giving heed to things that are good, and becoming better acquainted with the peculiarities of that new and living way, which the Lord Jesus "has consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh³."

The points, then, to which, in availing ourselves of the Apostle's argument, we may with profit direct our attention, are, first, *the blessedness* of "the man, to whom the Lord will not impute sin;" and, secondly, *the comprehensive* character of that blessedness in coming not upon the circumcision only, but on the uncircumcision also.

And, first, how are we of this family situated with regard to that blessedness, of which the Apostle speaks with such evident exultation? Are we of the number of those "to whom the Lord will not impute sin"? We must answer these questions, by asking ourselves another. Are we truly converted to God? And to this question it is difficult for any man to give an immediate or absolute affirmative. Let us take time to consider our answer. The signs of true conversion are manifest, and they are, repentance that needs not further repentance, unbounded faith in Christ, and, as legitimate fruits of these, non-conformity to the world, spirituality in thought, word, and deed, attendance on the means of grace, unceasing efforts for the glory of God and the good of brethren, frequent self-examination, habitual watchfulness, and actual growth in grace, and progress in every good

¹ See Gen. xvii., throughout.

² Gal. iii., 9.

³ Heb. x., 20.

word and work. "If these things be in us and abound, they make us that we shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ¹," and moreover, place us among the blessed people, unto whom, for his own death's sake, the Lord will not impute sin. "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins²," and is not of the number of those whom the Lord thus gloriously blesseth.

And is it not true blessedness to have no sin imputed unto us, to be children of God by adoption, to be undoubted members of his family, to be heirs through grace of his promises, to have no fear of death, or occasion of stumbling in us, to obtain everlasting life? Is not this much better blessedness than all the praises of man, all the overflowings of worldly prosperity, all the enjoyments of temporal gratification, all the mightiest energies of life, health, and strength, that we could ever anticipate or compass? "Wherefore, the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things that are commanded you, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ³."

But further, we are told that this blessedness, of which the Apostle speaks with such evident exultation, is of a most comprehensive character; that it in fact comprehends all men unto whom the Lord, on account of faith through the blood of Jesus Christ, will not impute sin. What encouragement is this for all, without respect of persons, to come unto Christ!

What encouragement is this for sinners of every kind and degree; for worldly-minded, reprobate, ignorant, impenitent; for high and low; for prosperous and distressed; for hopeful and desponding, to come unto him in faith, in whom alone is forgiveness of sins! Happy Christian, that he has such a stay as this, even in his severest trial; that he has such a refuge as this, even in the moment of his fall! Happy Christian, that he has such "an anchor of the soul," when he is weak and wavering; that he can lean on an arm that is mighty, when that which is earthly has failed! Oh, come unto him all ye that thus travail and are heavy-laden, and he will give you rest! Oh, give unto him your whole hearts! Oh, turn unto him with your fullest confidence, with repentance not to be repented of; with prayer

¹ 2 Pet. i., 8.

² 2 Pet. i., 9.

³ 2 Pet. i., 10, 11.

⁴ Matt. xi., 28.

not to be turned into sin; with humility really felt; with charity unbounded; with faith unfeigned; and you will find him a most sufficient Saviour! Sinners though you be, your sin shall not be imputed to you. Stricken though you be with a curse, you shall, in the best of all senses, be blessed.

The year has now begun. It has set up its way-mark. It has parted you from a large portion of past time. It now lays open before you as large a portion to come. Let the future be managed better than the past. Let that future especially be heeded which opens in eternity. Even now you may be on the verge of that eternity. Delay not, then, a moment; but, before you draw another breath, before the hand strikes that cannot possibly miss its aim, turn yourselves in earnest, and live ye.

THE EPIPHANY, OR THE MANIFESTATION OF CHRIST TO THE GENTILES.

THE EPISTLE. *Eph. iii.*, 1 to 12.

FOR this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

2 (If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words;

4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)

5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

6 That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel:

7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the

grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

9 And to make all *men* see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:

12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.

The Epistle appointed for this day is well adapted to the occasion, inasmuch as it is a statement of the Apostle's special mission to the Gentiles, which was ordained by the manifold wisdom of God, "according to his eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus the Lord." The Apostle very much

enlarges here upon the eminent token of favour, which this mission and the special manner of conferring it bestowed upon him, and expresses his astonishment that so important an event as the participation of the Gentiles in God's promise in Christ, should have been permitted to be announced by so humble an instrument as himself'. "By revelation God made known unto me the mystery, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel." "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

This day we celebrate Christ's first and visible manifestation to the Gentiles¹; an event which was afterwards followed by manifestations much more glorious; and as, in these subsequent manifestations, the Apostle, by special revelation, bore so distinguished a part, it was most appropriate to the festival to associate with it his commentary upon its subject. We who now celebrate it are Gentiles, or rather descendants of those who, when the Gospel was first preached, were Gentiles. We are positive living proofs of the comprehensiveness of redemption; experimentally blessed witnesses of the fact, that the Gospel has brought "good tidings of great joy," not only unto the Jewish shepherds, but unto all people; signs that to the Gentiles the Gospel has been preached, and that by the Gentiles the Gospel has been received. When the Apostle first preached the Gospel to the Gentiles, our ancestors, the inhabitants of this land, were in darkness and knew not God.

But the revelation first made through the instrumentality of the Apostle, that "the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs," was in due time brought to this land; and from that period to the present, except during the dark ages, the knowledge of the truth has increased, and mankind has been made to see, "what is the fellowship of the mystery, which, from the beginning of the world, had been hid in God." As heirs, together with the whole world, of the hopes which the Epiphany has made manifest, but, in particular, as possessors of the nature and knowledge of those hopes, of which a large portion of the world is at present destitute, we, the members of a family professing godliness, have much whereof to give account, much for which to be thankful. And every individual amongst us is thus under obligation. The name of Christian, the possession of Christianity, the profession,

¹ Acts ix., 15.

² Matt. ii., 1—12 inclusive.

whether nominal or real, of faith in Christ, is quite sufficient to create this peculiar responsibility. Let a Christian only compare his present situation with the situation of the Jew of old, who was also highly favoured. As the Jew of old, who had the law, was held to be more inexcusable, if he went astray, than the Gentile who had not the law; even so it is now. He who is now placed, through his knowledge of the Gospel, within reach of the dispensation of the grace of God, will be held to be more inexcusable, if he goes wrong, than he who is not.

All of us, then, who are here assembled, have much whereof to give account, much for which to be thankful. Christ has been manifested to us from our youth up until now; he has been manifested to us in the Scriptures; manifested to us by ministers of Christ; manifested to us by parents and teachers; manifested to us, above all, by the light of the Holy Spirit. Has Christ, thus in so many ways manifested unto us, been received into the heart by faith, from the youth up until now? Or has the ear only heard him, but the heart rejected him? Does Christ reign in this household, as though he were in every sense its supreme Master? Or, does Satan disturb it with dissensions, and introduce into it the seeds of disunion, envyings, frauds, provocations, oppressions? Is there an evident impression on the mind of every one, that the knowledge of Christ is a trust, in which matters of everlasting moment are involved; a gift for which the thanks of every believer, both with his lips and in his life, are due? Or is it clear, that there is much misapprehension on this subject amongst us? that we make nothing more than an outward profession? that our affections are wholly fixed upon the world? and that we possess not any treasure in heaven?

The life, the daily life of each of us, will be the sure and true test. The star manifested Christ to the wise men; and they followed the leading of the star, and were guided to Jesus. The Apostles, and especially the Apostle Paul, manifested Christ to Gentile nations, and many "believed with the heart unto righteousness, and with the lips made confession unto salvation¹." So also "the life we now live in the flesh," if Christ has in truth been manifested to our souls, we shall "live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us, gave himself for us²," and, as at this time, manifested himself to us. We shall live as becometh his true disciples; as teacheth that law, which he hath delivered, as moveth that gratitude, which he by his

¹ Rom. x., 10.

² Gal. ii., 20.

love stirreth up within us. We shall strive to make every action of our lives, every movement of our souls, conformable to his will. We shall live altogether to the glory of God; live in constant communion with heaven; live in sweet intercourse with the children of God; live in a state of separation, although not of alienation, from the world.

In particular, we shall not forget that many around us, although disciples by profession, know not God; and that many far from us, even heathens and Gentiles innumerable, have never been told that a Saviour has come into the world. To these Gentiles and nominal believers we shall deem it a prominent duty, so far as our means and opportunities go, to assist in extending a true knowledge of Christ, and so bringing them out of their present darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel. And for this there is every encouragement. Christ will assist us; Christ will reward us; Christ will give the increase. In all that we do for ourselves, in all that we undertake for others, his grace, if our faith fails not, will be with us, and his grace will be sufficient for us. And when we presently kneel down to pray, may we strive that so it may be; that our perception on all these points, if in any respect heretofore clouded, may speedily be cleared up; that our energies may be quickened, our desires spiritualized, and Christ, so long manifested to us, for the future really dwell in us, and make his love perfected in us.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE EPISTLE. *Rom. xii., 1 to 5.*

[BESEECH you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service.*

2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

3 For I say, through the grace

given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of *himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

5 So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

In the exhortation with which this Scripture opens, allusion is evidently made to the prescribed Jewish ordinance of propitiating God by sacrifice. On the appointed day the beast

was slain, the blood poured out, the body offered in sacrifice. And when this was done, the worshipper was held to be clean, his sin blotted out, and an offended God propitiated. And this expiation was accounted effectual, because the sacrifice was a holy sacrifice, the victim an innocent victim, the life offered a life free from sin.

The Apostle intimates, that a Christian, like this sacrifice, must be holy, if he would be acceptable with God; and declares, that the body must be a living sacrifice, the life a dedicated offering, the members servants of God, and agents in all works of faith and labours of love. But not only does the Apostle inform the Romans that their bodies must be wholly given up, and specially consecrated to spiritual services, but their souls also. "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." As if he had said, "be no longer the worldly-minded people you once were, but in token of your professed subjection to the spiritual religion you have adopted, change your conduct and conversation altogether, that ye may prove, experimentally to yourselves, and practically to the world, that you are *new* men; new in mind, new in faith, new in every thing. Your souls will thus be the prompters of your bodies in all things pertaining to the service of Christ, and your bodies the willing ministers of your souls in all the works of godliness."

Careful, then, to guard them against a fall, or any kind of inadvertency or imperfection, the Apostle wisely reminds these faithful converts of their danger, and tells them, that they must not "think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, but soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith." And he gives two good reasons for this prudent advice. He tells them, first, that "God has dealt to every man his measure of faith;" or, in other words, that he has given to every man his faith, and whatsoever other spiritual gifts he possesses. And he tells them, secondly, that all their spiritual gifts have been given them for the benefit of one another. "For as we have many members, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." To all these points, severally and in order, let us now direct, with a special view to edification, our particular attention.

First, then, we are besought to "present our bodies a living

sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service." And what does this intimate to us? That we should employ our bodily members, as much as may be, in works of faith and labours of love, not polluting them beyond measure with worldly works and carnal pursuits, but giving them full occupation in ministering to our own spiritual wants and the spiritual wants of others, and doing the bidding of him, who is the great Master both of our souls and bodies. And he beseeches us "by those mercies" we have already received, by those blessed Gospel privileges, which, while others have been sitting in darkness, we have been permitted to possess, by those means of grace which we enjoy, by those hopes of glory which we anticipate. Surely these edifying and interesting facts will constrain us to be thankful, and to show forth our thanks and praise, "not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves, our souls and bodies, to the service of the Lord Jesus; and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all our days." But what, in real truth, is our present actual situation with respect to these matters of moment? Are we duly impressed with a sense of the many mercies of God, at least sufficiently so to repent of sin, grow in grace, and go on unto perfection, sufficiently so for the good of our souls, sufficiently so for purposes of holiness?

There is great necessity imposed upon us to be thus sensible of obligation; and woe be to us if we do not duly regard all that the Lord hath done for us. And oh! may we at last be touched and softened by his great love, the great love of a Saviour dying for us; and be rather warned by his goodness, than driven by his power, to flee from the wrath to come. But until we have obtained this strong foundation of all true religion, a thankful sense of its gracious influences, let us be distrustful of our spiritual state; doubtful of our favour with God. If we desire to be "holy, unblameable, and unreprouable in his sight," we cannot be unmoved by an appeal to his mercies. If we are careless whether our faith fail not, or whether it be in us at all, we shall "set our faces like a flint," and refuse him that speaketh. What is our life? Are our bodies living sacrifices? Are all our members sanctified, and made meet for the master's use? Does each member discharge its office of dutiful love? Does each faculty of the mind yield itself up as an offering consecrated to one great purpose? Remember, "Christ bare our

¹ Isai. L., 7.

sins in his own body on the tree¹." His hand was stretched out to save us, his arm to help us,—and shall we grudge him our bodily services?

But we must ask ourselves, further, whether we are "transformed by the renewing of our mind?" It is an important question, and should not be overlooked altogether or lightly answered; for much depends upon it. Will our members do the Lord's work, if our souls do not acknowledge his authority? And will they hesitate a moment, if there be first a willing mind? The answers to these questions cannot be doubted. Hence then let us gather the unspeakable importance, the vital necessity of true conversion to God, and ascertain the foundation of the Christian character, and the right method of proving "what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Are we thus changed? Our own hearts will tell us, our own life will shew us, how we severally stand in this respect. The Scripture duly consulted will teach the right way. The world, truly estimated, will reveal its own hollowness. The world is the enemy of God. The Scripture bids us come out of it. Are we changed toward the world? Does the world find us changed? We cannot test ourselves better than by comparing ourselves thus with the world and with Scripture. May the Spirit prompt the inquiry, guide the inquirer, and sanctify the solution!

Those who have really undergone this change, should, however, beware of that tempter and seducer of the most truly converted, pride. Is this fleshly principle springing up amid the spiritualized affections of any of us? Are we beginning to "think of ourselves more highly," of others less highly, "than we ought to think"? The Apostle gives us two most excellent reasons for thinking more rationally, more soberly, on both these subjects. "God has dealt to us our measure of faith," our measure of grace, our measure of every thing good, and we have no right to presume upon it as though it were our own. Others have a demand on our good offices, and we must exert them strenuously in their behalf, abating our self-love, bringing down our high looks, dismissing our uncharitable thoughts, and centering all our joy and boast in the ripening faith of brethren. And humility, deep humility, the higher we rise in spirituality ourselves, should be our watchful aim and careful endeavour. "Presenting our bodies a living sacrifice," "transformed in mind," "not conformed to the world," how shall we take such effectual

¹ 1 Pet. ii., 24.

means of making our calling and election in all things sure, as by taking heed that no offence cometh, laying aside every weight, wiping away every blot, and watching and examining our hearts continually, and praying for grace, as continually, unto him, who, if we abide faithful, will "keep us and water us every moment, lest any hurt us; will keep us night and day!"

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE EPISTLE. *Rom. xii., 6 to 16.*

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;*

7 Or ministry, *let us wait on our ministering;* or he that teacheth, on teaching;

8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, *let him do it with simplicity;* he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

9 *Let love be without dissimulation.* Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

10 *Be kindly affectioned one to*

another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

13 Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

14 Bless them which persecute you; bless, and curse not.

15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

16 Be of the same mind one towards another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.

The Apostle, in this portion of Scripture, set apart for the use of this day, applies practically, and carries out in detail, a doctrine laid down on the last Lord's day, namely, that God has "dealt to every man his measure of faith," and appointed to him certain duties arising therefrom, as a member of his spiritual family. And as in that former portion of Scripture, the Apostle took this method of guarding the converts from the danger of spiritual pride, so does he here urge a minute attention to other practical duties, upon the same principle, and in the same spirit. As if he had said: "the spiritual gifts with which the grace of God has endowed you, were not intended to minister to vain-glory, and to puff you up with exceeding pride, as though you were personally superior to, and exalted above, your brethren. They were given you for a very different purpose, even for the edification of the Church, and the good of the whole Christian community."

¹ *Isai. xxvii., 3.*

This truth he develops at length in the portion of Scripture now before us, first pointing out the necessity of making each spiritual gift or office minister all the edification of which it is capable, and then directing attention to the numerous social, relative, and other obligations, which the Christian, divesting himself entirely of all selfish considerations, should fulfil. Prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, should each, he assures his brethren, be thus handled, and applied to the spiritual uses for which they were ordained. There should be no high-mindedness on the part of the prophet, because God enables him to prophecy; no assumption on the part of any other steward of the grace of God, because God gives unto him any particular part or lot in the ministry of reconciliation; but, on the contrary, a diligent desire and determination on the part of all to put the spiritual gifts they possess to a good use, employ them in the work of conversion, devote them to the extension of Christ's spiritual kingdom. And instead of thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think, they must think rather of the wants and afflictions of others; think rather of their own weaknesses and infirmities; do the greatest good they can in their generation, spiritual and temporal; and stablish, strengthen, and perfect themselves continually in every good word and work.

But next comes the question, how shall we turn the many valuable practical suggestions contained in this portion of Scripture to our soul's greatest advantage? This, I think, we shall do in the clearest, and hence very probably, in the most profitable manner, by reminding ourselves, first, that the Apostle addresses the holders of any office appertaining to the soul, and secondly, all Christian persons whatsoever.

First, the Apostle addresses the holders of any office appertaining to the soul. And what does he say to such persons? "Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation." Let us give ourselves up to the duties connected with our respective spiritual offices, and to them alone. One of us may be a minister of the Gospel; another a teacher in a school. One of us may be a distributor of tracts; another an occasional visitor in a sick room. What does the spirit, nay, rather the letter of the Apostle's admonition, prescribe to us? It pre-

scribes to us, that whatsoever office appertaining to the soul we are commissioned to hold, we should devote ourselves entirely and heartily to its due discharge; and setting aside all personal pretension arising from our position, concentrate on it our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength.

The minister of the Gospel is set apart to his sacred function by prayer, and the laying on of hands. He engages and is enjoined "never to cease his labour, his care, and diligence, until he has done all that lieth in him, according to his bounden duty, to bring all such as are, or shall be committed to his charge, unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among his people either for error in religion, or for viciousness in life¹." Must not then the minister "wait on his ministering," and "draw all his cares and studies this way"? Must he not, "as much as he may, forsake and set aside all worldly cares and studies"? Must he not be "studious in reading and learning the Scriptures, and in framing the manners both of himself and of them that specially pertain to him, according to the rule of the same Scriptures"? Must he not so "endeavour himself, from time to time, to sanctify the lives of himself and his, and to fashion them after the rule and doctrine of Christ, that they may be wholesome and godly examples and patterns for the people to follow"²?

And so, in like manner, must those who are appointed to any minor spiritual function, discharge its obligations. The teacher in a school must "wait on teaching;" give his mind wholly to it, qualify himself sufficiently for it, that his profiting may appear to all, that the profit of his pupils may appear to all. The distributor of tracts must be equally diligent in his vocation, select his tracts with judgment, and suit them to the circumstances of the receivers. And the occasional visitor in a sick room must be instant at the appointed season in exhortation, rebuke or encourage as he sees occasion, call attention to the origin of the affliction, and adapt his prayers, readings, and instructions, to the exigencies of the Christian patient. Prominence will thus be given, as it ought, to a spiritual office; and without neglect of any worldly duty, highest interest will be taken in that which concerns the soul.

Secondly, the Apostle addresses all Christian persons whatsoever. And what does his exhortation imply? Surely it

¹ Ordination Service.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

implies a variety of duties appertaining to Christian perfectness, and the difficulty of attaining, nay even of approaching the high standard of its excellence. And surely it implies the necessity of fixing the whole attention upon "the strait and narrow way which leadeth unto life," and the folly and sin of exalting that fleshly nature which, even in a state of comparative spirituality, is prone to infirmity. How much must we think of the *manner* of performing a Christian duty! "He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness." And how much must we think of the *motive*! "Let love be without dissimulation." And how fixed, how unalterable, how uncompromising, must be the one line of duty we take. "Abhor that which is evil: cleave to that which is good." And how elevated in their nature must be our affections one toward another, now that we are disciples of Christ, our exalted and heavenly Saviour. "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another."

And who should be so diligent in his worldly vocation, as the faithful Christian,—the Christian who undertakes, in obedience to his Master, to be instant in all acceptable service, spiritual or temporal? Who should be so careful as he "not to be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord"? And in all his distresses, where will he find such sure consolation, as in the promises of Jesus Christ, the prophet and dispenser of all good things, he who encourages us to be "joyful in hope, patient in tribulation, instant in prayer," and requires of us, if we would be thus perfect, to be thus minded?

Whatever means of helping our poorer brethren we possess, we must exert, if we would work out the principles we espouse; especially in the brotherly offices of distributing to the necessity of believing brethren, and "bringing the poor and them that are cast out to our house¹." And, further, we must put a restraint, with the help of the grace of God, upon our naturally irritable feelings; and "bless them that persecute us; bless rather than curse." And how full of sympathy must we be with those "that rejoice and with those that weep," if we would do the work given us to do, and call forth the feelings of a true and lively faith. Yea, must we not be of "the same mind one towards another," in all seasons and under all circumstances; living with all in peace; thinking of them charitably; agreeing with them,

¹ Isai. lviii., 7.

as much as may be, in doctrine; and in the exercise of a boundless benevolence and love, "minding not high things," when we have the power to do good, but "condescending to men of low estate"? Must we not do all this, and much more, if we would prove the sincerity, the stability, the humility of our faith? Must we not do all this, although wholly unable to do it in our own strength, if we would bear the cross and win the crown, which our Master has borne and won before us? Yes, verily, the difficulties in our way are great; the obligations of our calling many; the demands on our energies various; the dangers of self-righteousness urgent; the self-denials for Christ's sake not a few; the duties to fellow-Christians innumerable. But Jesus, the refuge of sinners, lightens the difficulties, and lessens the demands on our energies with his own precious blood; and in the strength of an all-sufficient Spirit, the heavily laden but not daunted penitent checks his self-righteousness, multiplies his self-denials, performs his weighty and many duties, rich in faith, overflowing in charity, and "rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God".

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE EPISTLE. *Rom. xii., 16 to 21.*

16 Be not wise in your own conceits.

17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place

unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

The Epistle appointed for this day's service pursues the course of exhortation begun on the last Lord's day, being in fact the latter portion of that instructive chapter, which has, I trust, given full and profitable employment to our thoughts on two successive evenings. The exhortation to which our attention is drawn this day, is not less important or instructive than the preceding, inasmuch as it pursues the wide and varied subject of Christian obligation, upon which we have partially entered, and with which it is most meet that we should be well acquainted. It is very important to remember that faith in the Redeemer's

¹ Rom. v., 2.

atoning blood, that fundamental principle of all acceptable righteousness, must, in order to be acceptable, bring forth fruit as abundantly in the world, as in the sanctuary; and give as bright an evidence of its vitality in public as in private life. Not that there need be any *parade* in our religion in order to make it perfect and complete. No, indeed. The very essence of pure religion is humility; and our faith cannot be well grounded, if it be in the least degree tainted with the leaven of vanity. But there must necessarily be a certain degree of publicity connected with profession and practice; and profession and practice are our only means of proving and ascertaining the truth. "By their fruits ye shall know" your brethren. Yea, and by your own fruits ye shall be known yourselves. But one of the most prominent of these is humility.

The Apostle clearly proves, in these lengthened and forcible addresses to the Roman converts, that he never meant, when he preached justification by faith, to obscure the beauty of holiness, but to show that by faith the sinner was justified¹, and by works was faith made perfect². And thus do we arrive at the true conclusion of the whole matter, as maintained by the Apostle. We must first renounce our own righteousness, before we can obtain the righteousness of Christ; but when we have thus "believed in God," we must be "careful to maintain good works³."

And what is the first good work or duty, of which the Apostle here reminds the Romans? "Be not wise in your own conceits." We know the Scriptures. We know many other things. Much, perchance, may we happen to know, by the fortune of a good education, or a better understanding, of which others are ignorant. This, however, should not puff us up. Our knowledge, whatever it be, has not been acquired, but given. God has given it, and his grace has furnished the fruits. But very much more unprofitable, may we be assured, is the knowledge "which puffeth up," than the "charity which edifieth⁴."

Again, the Apostle exhorts, "Recompense to no man evil for evil." If love is in us and abounds, and faith prompts the love, and Scripture nurtures the faith, there will be no inclination to retaliate an injury. Faith working by love will lose all thought of the offence, in the relative position of the offender. Is this our faith, our working faith? Is this our love, our thoughtful love?

¹ Rom. iii., 28.

² Titus iii., 8.

³ James ii., 22.

⁴ 1 Cor. viii., 1.

The Redeemer has set us the example, as he has given us the precept. Oh may we be "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath!" Again, it is said, "Provide things honest in the sight of all men." How minute is the attention of the Gospel, no less than of the Law, to every moral duty. The believer is not working out his principles, if he fails in the matter of honesty. The Gospel, that Gospel which teaches the all-important necessity of faith, tells him so. Perfect purity in thought, word, and deed, must follow from such a faith, as a matter of course. Is it thus with each of us? Do we ever wrong one another, even in a little? Are we ever greedy of gain, covetous of that which does not belong to us, discontented with moderate worldly profits, extortioners where we ought to be liberal? Possibly we may be compelled to plead guilty to some of these charges; and if so, let us remember that we are of the number of those who "love the world," and that "the love of the Father is not in us¹."

The Apostle counsels further, "If it be *possible*, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Here is an admission made of the *great difficulty* of being of one mind, and living in peace. Ours is, in the main, a wicked and a wayward world; and wherever there is, to any extent, wickedness and waywardness, there to the same extent must there be the elements of disunion. Truth cannot agree with error, love with uncharitableness, faith with sin. But although there must ever be division; and the believer must come out from the company of sinners and be separate, and do so at all risks, yet will it still be in the power of a prudent as well as fervent believer, to live, in the main, peaceably with all men. Never compromising his principles, he may be able to do much by conciliation. Never giving offence in anything, he may gain a real victory by suffering a seeming defeat. Let self-examination put the question, "Do I, as much as lieth in me, live peaceably with all men? Do I neither give nor take offence? Am I a peacemaker in word and deed?" Oh how happy must we be, if we can answer these inquiries in the affirmative; and, if not, oh how miserable, because how far from love, patience, heavenly-mindedness, and the kingdom of God.

But once more, the Apostle, as if he had not already been sufficiently emphatic on this most important subject, becomes, in the passage that follows, still more so. "Dearly beloved, avenge

¹ James i., 19.

² 1 John ii., 15.

not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for, it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord¹." And then follows an apparently not unreasonable conclusion, "Therefore, if thine enemy hunger feed him, if he thirst give him drink, for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head²." A man of peaceable disposition may almost always avoid giving offence; but it is not possible for him to escape all wrong and all injustice. The Apostle's caution therefore is, that, if injury befalls him, he must not retaliate, not contend, not oppose wrath with wrath. And he gives the reason. He declares, that the Lord is the Supreme Avenger of wrong, and that to him alone, as the great Judge of all the earth, is the doer of wrong accountable. He proves this incontestably by a reference to the old Scriptures, in which the doctrine in question is plainly asserted, and the former and latter dispensation made to agree in a conjoint condemnation of deliberate malice.

He further proceeds to show, that a patient and quiet behaviour under injury, and a disposition to succour and befriend the wrong doer, if he happen to need assistance, will soften the hardest heart, and disarm the most inveterate hatred. Let us restrain our impatient tempers when we suffer an injury, with the same powerful arguments. Remembering that the Lord is the only authorized avenger of wrong, and that the repayment of wrong by kindness is the surest method of changing its purpose, let us never be tempted to "avenge ourselves, but rather give place unto wrath." Pride perchance may whisper vengeance. Insulted honour, injured reputation, impaired estate may arouse the gentlest spirit into fury, and urge the injured to cry aloud for redress. But all these feelings must be quelled, if they exist; must be kept down, if they make an effort to arise. Is it not sufficient that the Lord should avenge? Is it not necessary that the injured should be patient? And is it thus that we feel, when we are in such a situation? Are we not only careful to avoid giving provocation, but careful above measure to avoid taking it amiss? Can we bring down our high spirit to such an humble prostration of soul? Can we thus tame our wildness, humble our pride, "adorn ourselves with a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price³." Our Lord did so before us under much more discouraging circumstances. The Spirit helpeth our infirmities, even if they be very great.

¹ Deut. xxxi., 35.² Prov. xxv., 21.³ 1 Pet. iii., 4.

But, finally, we are warned “not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good.” This is a precept, which bears reference to the same subject, and extends the great principle of forbearance still further. It clearly intimates, that however great the provocation, and in particular, of however long continuance, we must not suffer ourselves to grow weary of our well doing, but patiently abide alway. We must be as incessant in acts of kindness and words of love, as our enemies are in their enmities, and be so incessant in these Christian charities, as at length to overcome by gentleness, and obtain the victory by concession. How glorious must be such a conquest! How completely in accordance with the spirit of our blessed faith! How high and holy a triumph, because a triumph over self, a mastery of affections and lusts! Hosts on all sides assail us, hosts of evil passions within, hosts of evil workings without. But by concession we overcome our enemies, by exertion, overcome ourselves. In the spirit of the crucified we fight. In the strength of the victorious one we conquer. And if we will only thus strive to overcome our strongest enemies—only take up, as our safest weapons, the weapons of Christ and his cross—who, in the midst of our heaviest trials, will have power to separate us from the love of Christ? “Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we shall be more than conquerors through him that loved us!”

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE EPISTLE. *Rom. xiii., 1 to 7.*

[ET every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for

he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

¹ Rom. viii., 35, 37.

The Jews are supposed to have held, that they, as the people of God, were under no obligation to pay tribute to the Gentiles. The disciples of Christ, as being, in a much higher sense, a chosen nation, might possibly have thought the same, the more especially as many of them were converts from Judaism, and might be supposed to have imbibed from their connection therewith, prejudices not easily dissipated. And, moreover, at the time when this Epistle was written, the chief ruler of the Roman empire, to whom both Jews and Christians were alike subject, was a most cruel tyrant¹, and they might possibly have been tempted in some moment of excitement, disdainful of any sovereignty but the divine, to have resisted his authority.

But the religion of Jesus was the very reverse of political. When Jesus was required to pay the tribute, although satisfied of the injustice of the demand, yet did he comply with it, lest any should take offence. "Lest we offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook and take up the fish that first cometh up, and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money; that take and give unto them for me and thee²." And when Jesus was before the governor, he explicitly disclaimed, for himself and his religion, all connection with the present world. "If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence³."

Thus was the religion of Jesus, although devoid of political character, yet not without a character conducive to the welfare of states. If it meddled not with politics, it tended to settle them. If it did not lay down rules for the government of a community, it refused to resist those that were already established. The Epistle for the day extends this principle, illustrates it, and enlarges upon it. Let us now give it our attention.

The first principle laid down is, that *civil obedience* is a *Christian duty*. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God." God is the fountain of power, and it is his will that there should be magistrates to guard the peace of societies. All human power then being in him, of him, by him; religiously and in his fear should the obedience of the governed be offered. Let this be our principle as Christian subjects; and even if great in the kingdom of heaven let us be little in our own sight. Indeed, a meek and quiet spirit, which is a great

¹ The Emperor Nero. ² Matt. xvii., 24—27. ³ John xviii., 36.

ornament of the Christian character, and a necessary fruit of lively faith, is in effect a power which brings all the passions into subjection, and whenever it prevails in the heart, will be visible in the conduct. If then it ever happens that we find ourselves inclined to "despise governments and speak evil of dignities," we must begin to doubt our power of self-control, or at least to accuse ourselves of having somewhat turned aside after Satan. What, in fact, is our ordinary state of feeling on this subject? Do we reverence the office of a magistrate, whatever be the character of him who is invested with it? Or, if the office be administered badly, or the character of the administrator bad, still do we strive to think of it as respectfully as we can, assail it as little as possible, defend it from the assaults of others, because it has been ordained of God?

But further, we should be, as Christians, obedient to the civil power, on account of the good purpose of its institution. And what is the good purpose? "Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil." They are "the ministers of God to us for good." "Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same." Rulers, if they discharge their office well, consult the public welfare. It is the very business of their office to commend and to encourage well-doing; to guard from harm not only good, but all citizens; to redress the injured; to protect the weak; to "do justly and love mercy;" in a word, to order all things for the greatest good of the largest number. What a glorious office must this be, if fearlessly and zealously discharged! Of what great good is it capable, if all that good be drawn forth! For the happiness of *all* is here concerned; the peace of a *community* is here the question. Every man feels the influence of a diligent magistrate. Every man knows the detriment of him who is unjust. Let the Christian magistrate make his office a Christian office. Let him make it, as much as lieth in him, a generally beneficial, an extensively useful, a universally honoured office. And to this end let him put it to the holy purpose, whenever he has the opportunity, of upholding true religion, vindicating injured innocence, forwarding truth and justice, and promoting the dominion and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. And may every Christian citizen, wherever this is the case, uphold with a joyful zeal a function thus righteously administered, covet earnestly praise of the same, and do that which is good with alacrity. Thus will God be served in his representative.

¹ Compare 2 Pet. ii., 10, with Jude 8.

Thus will the representative honour his Master. Thus will the citizen live peaceably, live holily, live happily.

Again, we are constrained to be subject to the higher powers, because they are armed with the sword of justice. "They that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." "If thou dost that which is evil, be afraid, for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." The magistrate or civil ruler, being, in right of his office, God's earthly delegate, must work the work of him who sends him, be it joyous or grievous; must overawe with the strength of wrath, as well as "draw with the cords of love;" must strike the criminal, as well as honour the righteous doer. The Lord works thus in all his proceedings. He punishes as well as rewards now. He threatens as well as promises for the time to come. He would have you love, he will make you fear him. If the magistrate then, holding the sword, as well as balance, of heavenly justice, deals with offenders as God does, he will be no respecter of persons, but strike the avenging blow, wherever wrong, fraud, or crime has been committed. And the private Christian, grateful whenever God is glorified, truth exalted, and guilt discovered, prevented, or punished, will see the vengeance with sorrow, but note that it is just. And the hardened sinner will find, warned by the punishment of misdoing, that sin, when it amounts to crime, suffers even in this world; and that he who ordains an earthly judgment, may execute that which is to come.

Perchance there may be none of us who think that his sin will ever carry him thus far. But how mistaken is this notion! The greatest criminal always began with a small sin, and pursued by slow degrees his evil course, "deceiving and being deceived¹." He, perchance, thought well of himself before he began to be so exceeding sinful. And may not others?

Let us seriously ask ourselves, how we stand at present with respect to sin? Does it grieve us? Does it seem intolerable? Or, is it pleasant? Or, is it indifferent? The result may be important to us, if we make the inquiry in earnest. Jesus Christ is our atonement. He can wash away all sin, begun, continued, or increasing. Has ours been washed away? Or is it going before us to judgment, both temporal and eternal?

Subjection to the higher powers having been thus shown to be necessary, "not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake,"

¹ 2 Tim. iii., 13.

not only on account of man's punishment, but God's ordinance, the whole is summed up with an exhortation, to "render to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour." Christians are members of an outward community, and Christianity provides for man's well-being in every situation in which he can be placed. It is not forgotten, that he is living in civilized society, and under constituted authorities; and accordingly he is told to do his duty *as a citizen*. He must pay his tribute, render his custom, show his respect, dedicate his service as a Christian citizen; not deeming his privilege, as an inhabitant of a heavenly country and an heir of God through Christ, an exemption from all human obligation, but rather an additional motive for discharging it well; a method of showing the superiority of his religion, as a ground of obligation, to any other that was ever promulgated.

And what, after all, will be at the bottom of this and of every other branch of Christian duty, if the heart of the believer be properly constituted? Love, that great debt of sympathy; which we owe to all our kind, but especially to our fellow-citizens and fellow-Christians; love which "works no ill to a neighbour," "love which fulfils the law". And who can implant in us this love, if we have it not? Who can increase it, if it has already begun to grow? Even he, who for his own Son's sake, would "freely give us all things." Even he, who, for the exceeding great love wherewith he loveth us, will give us all that we need, even more than we can ask or think. Even he, who, if we use faithfully what he imparts to us freely, will finally afford to us that greatest proof of his love, an abode in his presence for ever.

¹ Rom. xiii., 10.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE EPISTLE. *Coloss. iii., 12 to 17.*

12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do ye*.

14 And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also

ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

The Colossians are here addressed as "the elect of God," and from their being also called, "holy and beloved," we may conclude that they were at that time in a satisfactory state, and not far from the kingdom of God. The Apostle's desire evidently is, that having gone thus far on the road that led to everlasting life, they should continue in the same course—go on unto perfection—add one grace unto another—until at length they found the gate that opened into the heavenly city.

In those days, as well as in the present, it was necessary that the multitude of the believers should be as faithful and faultless, and perfectly joined in one mind and one judgment, as possible, not only on account of the incalculable benefit to their own souls, but for the Gospel's swifter advancement, and God's greater glory. Hence it is that we so often find the Apostle, not only exhorting the hardened to turn to God, but the faithful to put on greater sanctification. And hence it is, that the passive as well as active virtues, the relative as well as positive duties, are all in turn inculcated, as fruits that must follow from putting on Christ. And, indeed, how should "the elect of God" be distinguished from those not belonging to him, but by peculiar sanctity, great faith, extraordinary self-denial, exceeding charity? How incessant should be their prayers, their works, their watchings, their contentions with sin! Are not the heathen the very reverse of this? Are not all unbelievers the very reverse of this? And must not the practice, as well as profession of "the elect of God," be the very reverse of the practice and profession of heathens and unbelievers? Yes; we have taken upon ourselves high obligations as "the elect of God,"

and unless we fulfil them, must forfeit the hopes, the privileges, the promises, of our holy election; must lose the rights of discipleship, must sink down to the level of the heathen.

So great necessity, then, existing of being in truth, as well as in appearance, "the elect of God," let us take advantage of this portion of Scripture, to note some of the signs of the election of God, and to ascertain thereby how far we do what we say, in a word, are at present God's elect or no. And, first, what is it to be, with reference to God, an elect person? It is, in a lower sense, to be called or chosen to a possession of the knowledge of the Gospel, to be, in fact, a professing, or, as it is sometimes more plainly called, a nominal Christian. A person thus situated is, so far as a knowledge of the Gospel goes, a person most highly favoured, and placed in his high position by God, but abuses his glorious privileges, and counts that blood of the covenant wherewith he has been sanctified, an unholy thing. On the contrary, he is, in the higher and the better sense, an elect person, who has been called or chosen by the special love and grace of God to a *practical acquaintance* with his will, and a faithful obedience to his Gospel, not indeed arbitrarily or unconditionally, but because he has shown a willingness to heed the truth.

Let us suppose that there are amongst us, on the present occasion, those who come under both these descriptions of an elect person; how shall we best adapt to their respective cases the truths contained in this portion of Scripture? Let us humbly attempt the task, and trust that God will be with us. First, "the elect of God" are exhorted to "put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Here is a portraiture of real, evangelical holiness, not that flimsy, shallow semblance of it, which shoots out its arrows, even bitter words, at all who do not belong to a particular sect, but that pure principle of faith unfeigned, which, without pretence or semblance of any kind, believes, obeys, forbears, and suffers, as the Gospel requires.

Are any of us in the situation of knowing God, but in works (these more especially) denying him? The Apostle warns us, whosoever we are, to know God in reality, to know him in presence no more. We must "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts"¹—learn the will of God herein, as taught in his word—

¹ Gal. v., 24.

and see how completely the Son of God, our great example and atonement, kept under his body, and brought it into subjection. At present cold-hearted, selfish, vain, contentious, revengeful, implacable, like the unchristian heathen, we must put on for the future the mild, the passive, the gracious virtues of the suffering Christ, and remembering all that he bore for us, bear and forbear much less for him.

And what must be the course taken by those who, like the Colossians, know the Lord in a still nearer manner? They must be especially watchful against a fall—show themselves true disciples of a suffering Saviour by constancy under trial—and rejoice in every opportunity afforded them of taking up their cross, and sacrificing some propensity not yet mortified. And how shall they carry on this fight with sin? By frequent prayer; by heedful self-control; never desisting from mortifications of self, never departing from principles laid down, never despising opportunities, as the Apostle most expressively describes it, of “putting on Christ.” Thus will self-love disappear, and grace obtain the victory.

“Above all these things,” says the Apostle further, “put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.” What a delightful virtue is charity! And what an inducement to put it on, that it is the bond of perfectness! And what a just pre-eminence is assigned to it, in being ordained to be put on above all things. And will it not, if put on, be like the amplest and warmest clothing, defend us from all the blasts that blow, and enable us to encircle even others in its folds of protection and kindness? Yes, whether it be the virtue not yet attained by the worldly-minded, or not yet perfected even in the confirmed believer, it is indeed the virtue which groups together in one all the bright features of the Gospel, and hushes jarring passions into peace.

Let it not be supposed for a moment, that the Apostle meant to commend almsgiving only, especially ostentatious almsgiving, when he thus commended charity. No; charity includes almsgiving within its range, but its range, as has been stated, is very wide. And how very difficult to feel all therein comprised, nay, how very difficult to practise it? May we be moved to love thus by him who is love itself—to love all, even our enemies—to love much, even without requital—to love unto the end, even if the end be not nigh!

Again, “the peace of God should rule in the hearts” of “the elect of God.” Does it rule in ours, or is the ruling power in

ours like "a troubled sea that cannot rest¹," tossed to and fro with passion, tempest-driven with remorse, overshadowed with clouds and darkness that threaten an impending judgment. Oh! if our hearts be at present as the hearts of those who are elect only in word and in tongue, but not in deed and in truth, let us make haste to be reconciled to him who "preaches peace to them that are far off and to them that are nigh²," and then, even if the heavens above should crumble into ruins, and the earth beneath be removed like a cottage, we shall have that peace of God which will "keep our hearts and minds" tranquil and even happy "in Christ Jesus³." The Apostle appears, in the exhortation that next follows, to recommend the practice of psalmody as an exercise highly edifying to "the elect of God." And, in truth, it must be, if grace be in the heart; if the heart is really thankful for the love of the Saviour, and is desirous of obtaining every opportunity of recording its thankfulness. Much time might be taken up whenever this is the case, and that profitably, in the composition of spiritual songs, the adaptation of them to music, and frequent rehearsals, both in public and private, of the praises of Jesus the Saviour. Indeed these, and all other expressions of thankfulness, cannot be too abundant or too devout, abundant as are, in truth, the blessings we receive—inexhaustible the treasures of grace—inconceivable the glories to come.

Can a whole life of gratitude make even an approach to the repayment of so large a debt? But then we can offer our thanks in the name and merits of him who does every thing else for us, and we know that, in and through him, we have any petitions we desire; can even do that sufficiently which we could not under ordinary circumstances do at all. Thankfulness, then, and its due expression, peace and its fruits, charity and its power of perfecting, forgiveness, forbearance, long-suffering, humbleness, kindness, mercies, these are the robes of spirituality, which, if we are, without doubt, "the elect of God," we shall, in due season, put on, and with which, "if we be clothed, we shall not be found naked⁴." Be it our care forthwith to ascertain, with the help of God's grace, whether his Son has clothed us with these spiritual ornaments, and his Spirit enabled us to put them to their intended use, never forgetting, that unless we are in this sense "the elect of God," we cannot possibly inherit his heavenly kingdom.

¹ Isai. lvii., 20.

² Philip. iv., 7.

³ Eph. ii., 17.

⁴ 2 Cor. v., 3.

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE EPISTLE. 1 *St. John* iii., 1 to 8.

BEHOLD, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

The privilege of being, in a true sense, a child of God, is here set forth by the Apostle with peculiar distinctness and earnestness. The blessedness, the honour, the obligations, the tokens of so glorious an adoption, are all in turn enlarged upon, and special instruction and encouragement is given to all to become faithful members of Christ's spiritual family. And here in the outset, how great must be our astonishment, that the high and holy Being who permits us to call him Father, should vouchsafe so far to humble himself, as to dwell in the contrite heart, condescend to call us children, and make us his own by adoption. We had "sinned with our fathers, we had gone astray, we had dealt wickedly¹," and yet "the Lord loved us, yea, even with an everlasting love²." "He loved us and gave himself for us³." He loved us and "gave his life a ransom for many⁴." "Yea, even as a father pitieth his own children, even so hath the Lord pitied⁵." He "remembered whereof we were made. He remembered that we were but dust⁶."

It is in this spirit that the Epistle opens. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." Behold indeed, and behold with reverence, behold with thanksgiving, behold with astonishment, ye who are called the sons of God, that your avenging

¹ Ps. cvi., 6.² Jer. xxxi., 3.³ Gal. ii., 20.⁴ Matt. xx., 28.⁵ Ps. ciii., 13.⁶ Ps. ciii., 14.

Judge has become your forgiving Father, that your forgiving Father has forgiven you through his only Son, and that thus you, who were before enemies of God, and exiles from his favour, have now become, through the satisfaction of an accepted atonement, his accepted sons and daughters. Lest, however, there should be any mistake amongst us on so important a subject, and all should seem included in an adoption to which few, it is to be feared, have been admitted, we must note further the restrictions with which the sacred writer carefully guards his doctrine from misinterpretation.

First, then, we ascertain, that adoption into God's spiritual family is a distinction not recognised by the world. "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." There is nothing in the condition or character of him who by faith has been made partaker of God's grace, to stamp him with any worldly token of pre-eminence. There is nothing in his condition or character calculated to attract the love, attention, or interest of the great mass of the community; nothing to receive commendation from the unthinking, wayward multitude. And it is thus with him, in this respect, as it was with Jesus before him. "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? He is despised and rejected of men, and we hid, as it were, our faces from him¹."

But further, we ascertain, that as at present we are sons of God by being conformed to his image, so hereafter we shall have the great distinction conferred upon us of being like him in every other respect, if we continue unto the end faithful. Notwithstanding, therefore, the world's ignorance of us, contempt of us, hatred of us, we have in this blessed experience of the Lord's present mercies, in this certain though somewhat mysterious outline of his future intentions of mercy, a glorious assurance of salvation, which more than counterbalances all seeming misgivings. "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world²."

Once more, we are fully informed, (so fully that there can be no mistake,) what the true tokens of spiritual adoption are. And it is of the utmost importance that we know what these are, because hereby we find out by the surest indications, whether we are true members of Christ's spiritual family or no. Sin, then, wilful, deliberate, habitual sin, is the proof that we do not belong

¹ Isai. liii., 1, 3.

² John xvi., 33.

to Christ. And purity from sin, inward, outward, absolute purity from it, purity from it in particular in the worst form in which it ever appears, the form of impenitence, is the proof that we are sons of God. For thus does the sacred writer lay down the true distinction between sons of God and children of the devil. "Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure." "Whosoever abideth in him, sinneth not." "Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous." And on the other hand, it is as plainly declared, that "he that committeth sin is of the devil," and that "whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law." "Whosoever sinneth hath not seen God, neither known him." We thus ascertain, what it is to be sons of God; and may readily gather what must be done by those who would know, whether as yet they are sons of God, or no.

Do we desire to know this? Let us make the inquiry by asking ourselves, first, whether we have a well-grounded hope? whether we purify ourselves? whether we aim at the highest perfection of purity? whether we abide in Christ and sin not? whether we do righteousness and are righteous, even as Christ is righteous? And then, let us ask ourselves, if the answers that we can furnish to these questions are not satisfactory, whether we commit sin? whether we transgress what is written in the law? whether we sin to such a degree, that we must certainly be of the number of those that see and know not God? And most probably, conscience will assure us, that we have most of these signs of sin about us, and are alienated from a loving Father by reason of wicked works.

And what must be our encouragement and incentive, what our manner of life and conversation, if we really can prove ourselves to be, in the scriptural and practical sense, sons of God? We must look steadily onward to the hope set before us, and make it our high inducement, our single motive, our glorious obligation, to abide in our Father's house for ever. We must often think of his great love—gratefully muse on his precious promises—never heeding the world's disregard, never sorrowing over present difficulties—but counting endurance a privilege, glorying in chastisement as love, long earnestly for the time when the children shall be like their Father, and see him as he is. And shall they not be obedient children? Shall they not be loving children? Shall not their obedience be continually on the

increase, their love continually grow in intensity, their faith put forth its leaves, its branches, its blossoms, its fruits, their humility, their patience, their continence, their charity, their knowledge, have daily, under the guidance of the Spirit, their more and more perfect work? Yea, they will read and think, yea, they will watch and pray, and with all these means and appliances, beyond a doubt their end will be glory.

But what shall they do, on the contrary, who have convinced themselves, after faithful inquiry, that, at present, they are not sons of God, but workers of the works of the devil? They have a fearful task before them; but it is a task that must be done, if they would ever see God as he is. "The Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." Those works of the devil then, those transgressions of the law, those commissions of sin, to which at present they are prone, in which at present they indulge, by which at present they make of none effect the Son of God's mission, must be repented of and done away, and repented of and done away in earnest. "He who was manifested to take away our sins" is waiting to be gracious, if we will only thus repent and believe. He will wash away our sins with his own precious blood. He will cleanse our hearts and hands with his Spirit's purifying influences. Like the father waiting for the prodigal son, he is preparing to meet us on our return—to receive us into his bosom—to restore us to our long-lost home. Shall we hesitate? Shall we linger? Shall we be obstinate? Shall we avert our eyes? Shall we harden our hearts? Nay, but we may wait too long, we may harden our hearts irretrievably, we may trust to uncovenanted mercy; and then—we shall be cast off for ever.

THE SUNDAY CALLED SEPTUAGESIMA, OR THE THIRD SUNDAY BEFORE LENT.

THE EPISTLE. 1 Cor. ix., 24 to 27.

24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

What a cheering account is this of the faith of our fathers! It is not a dark gloomy faith, encircled with austerities, clouded over with judgments. It is not a sluggish, inactive faith, sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. It is not a faith that grasps at a shadow, and dreams away its hours in visions of happiness not to be realized. It is not, in fact, a faith which speculates too much to be sufficiently practical; thinking of the prize, but not striving to win it; approving of temperance in all things, but not making the least effort to "keep under the body and bring it into subjection." No! Our faith, the faith of our fathers, the faith, it is to be hoped, of ourselves and our children, the faith, we may feel assured, that will prevail to the end of time, prevail in the hearts of all, prevail over every thing opposed to it, is a hopeful, happy, active, well-grounded, self-denying faith; a faith that has an object to reach, a work to finish, a record on high. The storms of life may rage, the clouds of woe may gather, the troubles of nations may be great and very terrible; but the faith which has cheered our fathers in times of old, still brightens the path of their children, and having surmounted all former perils, will be mighty through God for ever.

Roused then by the Apostle's stirring argument, excited by his glowing picture, moved by his lively example, let us, with the help of God's grace, quicken anew our flagging powers, awaken ourselves to the consideration of this animating appeal, and no longer "sleep as do others, but watch and be sober¹." And what is the Apostle's illustration of the Christian's pathway to heaven? He compares it to a race, in which competitors run for a prize; even to the race of ancient Greece, in which the chosen youth contended, and the swiftest gained the prize. In that race, however, he that would win the prize must strive for the mastery, and he that would strive for the mastery, must be "temperate in all things." And these conditions were gladly complied with, for the sake of the end in view. The discipline was cheerfully undergone, the contest with spirit sustained, and the crown that encircled the brows of the conqueror, although but a wreath of laurel, received and worn in triumph as his most glorious earthly recompense.

To this picture of earnest competition for a corruptible crown, in all its lights and shadows of character, does the Apostle here liken the struggle for that which is incorruptible.

¹ 1 Thess. v., 6.

And, first, it is implied, that there is a point to be reached; a triumph to be achieved; a crown to be won. And what is it? It is something incorruptible, something inconceivably glorious, something infinitely superior to any earthly distinction; even the assured attainment of eternal life and immortality in heaven. And who bestows the crown, that the redeemed, as kings and priests, shall wear for ever and ever? Even the everlasting Father, by the hands of his prevailing Son. He, with whom they had been at enmity, will wash away their sins, give them an imputed righteousness, and receive them as beloved children. Having blotted out all enmity, having done away all mortality, he will clothe them in white, crown them with immortality, put the palm in their hands, and make them more than conquerors. And this he will do when all earthly glories shall have vanished away, when the kingdoms of the world shall have become inalienably his own, and time shall have been swallowed up in eternity, and defeat in victory.

Secondly, it is implied, that this reward or crown must be sought, desired, contended for. Although the Redeemer of the world confers it of his own free mercy, and it is not earned by merit, but given of infinite grace—yet has there been a way marked out, by which they who would win and wear it must strive to obtain it, and that is, by striving for the mastery. The conqueror in the games of Greece contended in order to win. He had the crown in view, and he knew that to obtain he must run. It must be thus with the spiritual aspirant for a crown. He must strive lawfully, that is, according to the rules laid down in the Gospel, and then, if he strives to the utmost of his power, and according to the measure of grace bestowed upon him, he will obtain the crown, but not like the conqueror in the games, because he has made every requisite preparation, and done all that has been commanded him; but because the Rewarder has enabled him to conquer, and removed all impediments out of his way. Oh, the riches of the length, breadth, depth, height of the love of Christ! How infinitely does he serve us in redeeming us—giving, first, the atonement for sin, then, the rule of faith, further, the ability to follow the rules, and finally, the crown of the conqueror.

But again it is implied, that the Christian cannot strive for the mastery, cannot even enter the lists as a candidate, unless he puts himself through a course of discipline, and practising temperance in all things, qualifies himself thus for the contest

that ensues. It was thus that the candidate for a perishable crown prepared for the strife; and thus must he who strives for salvation "keep under his body and bring it into subjection." But there must be this difference between him who strives for the praise of God, and him who strove for the praise of man. In the one case, the preparation, the discipline, the abstinence, though severe, was but of short duration. The race was soon concluded, the conqueror soon proclaimed; and then, until another celebration of the games took place, but not unless it pleased the ambitious to contend again, there was not any farther necessity for temperance in all things.

But how does the case stand with the Christian? He can only once gain the prize; and the contention for it must be always going on. Life can be the only limit to his self-denials. Self-denials must alike extend to spirit, soul, and body. And all will depend on those self-denials. The natural body of man opposes the strongest possible obstacles to a successful mastery of passion. And until that natural body has, by the grace of God and prayer, been enabled sufficiently to overcome those obstacles, it will be wholly unequal to the contest. And the grace of God must be sought in faith, carried out in practice, and brought to bear upon all the affections; disciplining the soul, mastering the will, keeping under the body, bringing the understanding into subjection, and subduing unto Christ every thought, sense, emotion, desire, that cannot bear his cross; and the Christian must run not as uncertainly, contend not as one that beateth the air, but press onward in quick and glorious ambition "toward the mark, the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus¹."

Is any persuasion necessary to urge us to the contest, to move us to win the crown, to prompt us to go through the discipline, and run the holy race with patience? Is the crown itself insufficient? Is the prize valueless? Is the help weak? Is the incentive contemptible? If it is, (but surely it cannot be,) turn to the Apostle's stirring picture, and obtain from the zeal for an earthly crown an emulation for that which is eternal. Think of the comparatively poor, few, small motives that could have actuated the candidate for this world's glories! How little had he to win, the fading chaplet, the transitory applause, the present honour, the pride of a brief moment! And see what he underwent for that comparatively insignificant prize, what mor-

¹ Philip. iii., 14.

tification of the flesh, what sacrifice of appetites, what prostration of self, what disregard of everything but the great object in view! Imitate then, ye candidates for the love, the praise, the peace, the glory of God, aided with your better motives and sweeter promises, the temperance, and the abstinence of the rivals for a corruptible crown. Arouse yourselves from your sloth and sleep, "gird up the loins of your mind," "quit you like men, be strong¹." And lo! the prize invites you: the Rewarder of them that diligently seek him waits to give it you, and help is at hand; and you may yet win the prize, even the "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away²."

THE SUNDAY CALLED SEXAGESIMA, OR THE SECOND
SUNDAY BEFORE LENT.

THE EPISTLE. 2 Cor. xi., 19 to 31.

19 Ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye *yourselves* are wise.

20 For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.

21 I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also.

22 Are they Hebrews? so *am* I. Are they Israelites? so *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so *am* I.

23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I *am* more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by *mine own* countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

28 Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?

30 If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.

31 The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.

Whatever was the occasion which led the Apostle to enter so fully into the subject of his sufferings, we may well be thank-

¹ 1 Pet. i., 13.

² 1 Cor. xvi., 13.

³ 1 Pet. i., 4.

ful for it. We should not have otherwise known, much as we read of St. Paul's labours in the Acts of the Apostles¹, one tenth part of his eminent services in the cause of Christ. Boasting we must not call it, when he thus recounts with modest boldness, urged by a strong necessity, his claims to peculiar consideration, on the ground of his high office, and unwearied diligence. He had been opposed by false apostles, vilified in his ministerial character, disappointed in apparently hopeful converts, pained on account of divisions and heresies, and he was constrained to right himself in the eyes of enemies, and establish his claims to an undoubted apostleship.

And manfully and well does he undertake the task. Instead of bringing against his adversaries a railing accusation, and retaliating upon them in their own fashion, he contents himself with making a simple statement of his own qualifications and service, meeting them on their own ground, and without once entering on the subject of his miraculous call and conversion, proving by direct reference to the very points on which they prided themselves, that he was far better than they, and held by a just pre-eminence the rank of the very chiefest Apostle.

He shows, first, that he was of their own stock and lineage, and not a stranger or foreigner. "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I." He shows, further, that he can produce a far higher title to consideration in the Church of Christ than any other Christian minister. "Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more." And then he recounts at length all the labours and sufferings, all the responsibilities devolving on him, all the cares pertaining to the widely-spreading kingdom of Christ, which fairly placed him in this high position. He tells the Corinthians of his more abundant labours, stripes, imprisonments, perils of death. He tells them how many more times he had been scourged, stoned, and shipwrecked than other ministers, what perils by land and water he had experienced, what "perils of robbers, perils by his own countrymen, by the heathen, in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, among false brethren." And he tells them of his "weariness and painfulness, his watchings often; his hunger and thirst, his fastings often; his cold and nakedness." And he tells them of his "care of all the churches," and of his anxiety for the spiritual welfare of individuals; "Who is weak, and I am

¹ Acts xiii., and all the succeeding chapters.

not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?" And then he sums up all with an expression of regret that he had been compelled to glory, a declaration of the things that had led to that necessity, and an appeal to "the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ," that he had verily spoken the truth.

Let us now learn from this narrative of suffering and service, first, on what occasion and to what extent we may speak of *ourselves*. The Apostle spoke of himself, his toil, diligence, privation. But on what occasion had he thus toiled, and used diligence, and endured privation? He had obeyed the call of a heavenly Master, and in his service had begun a work, which in his service he must finish. And that work was the extension of the knowledge of salvation, even of that salvation which was for the remission of sins. And in the prosecution of that work he was opposed and vilified and misrepresented. And that it might not be impeded, he was compelled to vindicate himself. Souls must not be lost, the Church rent in sunder, Christ evil-spoken of, and he, through whom the offence had come, be silent. And under these peculiar circumstances, he spoke of himself.

And this may we do, but not more. Thus far may we go, and no farther. On such an occasion may we speak of ourselves, but on no other. If our endeavours for the welfare of others are thwarted, our purest motives misinterpreted, our faith, our doctrine, our manner of worship ridiculed, then must we in the Lord's name come forward, and show what we really are. The Lord must not be assailed, if possible, through any of his servants. The truth must not be evil-spoken of in our persons. The glory of God must not lose one ray of brightness through any fault of ours. Only let there not be a habit of boasting. Let there not be a love of vain-glory. "And he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord¹."

Secondly, we may learn, on what occasion and to what extent we should be ready to suffer. The Apostle spared not himself. To the utmost of his power, yea and almost beyond his power, does he here bear record, that he spared not himself. He submitted to everything and anything, that he might by all means save some. For the Lord's sake, and his soul's sake, and his brethren's sake, he was ready, nay, delighted to suffer adversities, troubles, and perils. Nay, he regarded them not as evils, but as mercies—trials of faith—means of grace—teachers of patience—crosses to be borne after a crucified Saviour.

¹ Compare Jer. ix., 24, with 1 Cor. i., 31, and 2 Cor. x., 17.

And thus must we joyfully submit to tribulation, in whatever form coming, to whatever extent appearing. Not that we shall be called upon, in all human probability, in these times, to suffer persecution, to die for our religion, to endure hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness, perils wherever we go, for Christ's sake and the Gospel's. No. But we must take in good part our light afflictions; thankfully receive them as less than we have deserved; pray that they may thoroughly change and amend us; and overwhelming as they seem for the time, account them but as passing clouds, which will soon open, and admit to our view a sun of righteousness with healing in his wings.

Thirdly, we may gather from the Apostle's narrative, that we must not oppose or vilify the duly authorized ministers of Christ. However moderate their talents, or indifferent their manners, our ministers are duly set over us. They are ministers of the Lord Jesus, acting in his name, speaking by his authority. The Apostle had to assert his apostleship, produce his credentials, proclaim his high commission. He had to speak as one having authority, to "rebuke that others might fear¹." And why had this been necessary? He had been thwarted, and called to account.

It is sin, then, to put impediments in the way of Christ's minister, to speak evil of him, put him to shame, put him to grief, turn him into ridicule. And why is it so especially sinful and unseemly to do this? Because Christ is thereby set at nought, his work hindered, his chosen vessel laid aside as unfit for use. And who shall despise Christ and sin not? Who shall at any time, or in any sense, be at enmity with him, and yet really love him? Who can directly or indirectly turn from him and live?

Finally, we see clearly that ministers and people, if faithful, will be supported. It was thus with the Apostle. He bore what he had to bear, meekly, yea, cheerfully. He could speak of it even with exultation. He was faithful as a teacher of the people, and faithful as a servant of Christ. And his faithfulness, spiritually engrafted and sorely tried, was his safeguard. Jesus never left him nor forsook him. Are we a faithful people? Do we love the Lord Jesus Christ, crucifying our affections and lusts, denying ungodliness, withstanding temptation, and all for Christ's sake?

If we are really thus stedfast in the faith, thus earnest in the profession of true religion, we are not permitted to despond.

¹ 1 Tim. v., 20.

A glorious crown is before us, a heavenly Spirit within us, and "underneath are the everlasting arms" of infinite righteousness. We shall glory in infirmities, rejoice in tribulations, triumph in trials of faith, for in all these things we are conquerors. Those, on the other hand, who are unfaithful in their stewardships, shall have the trials of life, but not the consolations; shall have cares, disappointments, mortifications without number, but no sweet hopes, no precious promises. Deaf to the engagements of their profession, they fulfil the lusts of the flesh. Fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, they have not the Spirit of Christ. "Having not the Spirit of Christ, they are none of his".

THE SUNDAY CALLED QUINQUAGESIMA, OR THE NEXT
SUNDAY BEFORE LENT.

THE EPISTLE. 1 Cor. xiii., 1 to the end.

THOUGH I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7 Beareth all things, believeth

all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

Charity, that rarely practised and thoroughly misunderstood virtue, is here described; and so described, that none can misunderstand its nature, or doubt its meaning. We have called

¹ Deut. xxxiii., 27.

² Rom. viii., 9.

charity a virtue, but it is rather an assemblage of virtues, or perhaps even still more correctly, an inward affection of the soul, implanted in it by the Holy Spirit, from which, as from one great source, many holy qualities flow. And oh, how truly spiritual, how perfectly joined unto Christ would he be, who combined within himself all that is here said of charity, and through whose soul, as through a thirsty land, rivers of this heavenly water flowed, refreshing it with peace, and enriching it with blessing. And how happy would such a man be. Joy and gladness within, he would diffuse joy and gladness without. Serenity in himself, he would spread serenity around him. Discords would vanish away before him, discontents disappear, privations subside into mercies. Every thing that before wore the aspect of sorrow, would then wear the aspect of sunshine. The past would recall blessing, the present gladden with content, the future assure every thing. For through futurity this affection will last; to eternity this heavenly radiance will shine, brightening with its path the circuit of the Redeemer's kingdom, increasing with perpetual increase, and deriving all its glory from the glory which excelleth.

And what has been the prime moving cause of all this love, the seed from whence the plant has grown, the fountain from whence the stream has flowed? Redemption, the love of God in redemption, the exceeding great love wherewith the Redeemer loved the soul. The soul loved God, because God first loved the soul. And he who most truly loves God, does most ardently love his brother also.

First, then, the Apostle declares, that a man cannot be a true Christian without charity. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." It thus appears, that the most eloquent speaker, the most gifted prophet, the most assured believer, the most liberal benefactor of the poor, the most willing martyr at the stake, may, notwithstanding their apparent goodness or greatness, be deficient in all substantial qualities, and be very far from being Christians indeed.

Are there any amongst us, who really "make a fair show,"

as St. Paul calls it¹, after some outward fashion, but need to inquire further, whether that show represents their practice? The question is important, for it involves the most momentous consideration that can possibly be submitted to a disciple of Christ—whether he is a genuine Christian, or no. This Scripture shows, that a man may make very high pretensions to faith, knowledge, and other high-sounding attainments, and yet be as nothing, yea as less than nothing, in the sight of God. Is it so altogether, or to any extent, with any of us? Let us believe it to be not impossible, and act accordingly. Outward pretensions, whatsoever they be, let us at once cast down; and study to make our *hearts* the Lord's. And let us be assured, that unless all those sinful propensities, which are contrary to charity, are entirely rooted out, and all ungodly works renounced, we shall be in a state of alienation from God, although often to all appearance in communion with him—we shall mock him when we seem to serve him—we shall be farthest from his favour when we pretend to be nearest to it. "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that doth he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh, of the flesh doth he reap corruption. And he that soweth to the Spirit, of the Spirit doth reap life everlasting²."

But let us note, secondly, what that charity is, which the Apostle so evidently holds to be the life of religion in the soul. "Charity suffereth long, and is kind. Charity envieth not. Charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." What a heaven on earth would our Christian world be, if it realized to the full this glowing description of the beauty of charity. How disinterested, how humble, how patient, how forgiving should we all be, how tender-hearted, how full of kindness, how truly grieved at the sorrows of an enemy, how comparatively blind to the failings of a brother.

And does it not seem a burden imposed on each of us, to endeavour to become what all should be, that so none of us may with justice accuse ourselves of putting impediments, through our own uncharitableness, in the way of universal charity? Yes, this burden is imposed on each of us, and light though it

¹ Gal. vi., 12.

² Gal. vi., 7, 8.

be and easy, rarely and with difficulty do we bear it. In some hearts worldliness lurks, in some envy, in some vanity. In some hearts pride springs up, in some uncharitableness, in some malice. One man is impatient; another man "renders evil for evil, and railing for railing." There is the talebearer, the liar, the dishonest man, and the man that puts the worst construction upon the supposed misdoings of a sinning brother. In all these cases there is sin; sin that vitiates the fairest professions, and offends against some statute in the comprehensive code of charity. And until such sin be blotted out by repentance, and God, for Jesus Christ's sake, forgives it, and gives us a new heart, and changes us by the operation of his Spirit, charity is not in us.

And must we not all plead guilty, more or less, to this charge, and confess that we need the change, acknowledge that in some dark recess of our hearts charity never sheds her light? Oh may that gracious and gentle influence, which the Apostle so well describes, and so well exemplified, now descend upon us, in all its fulness, and show us that "God is love, and that he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him¹;" show us that we must love one another if we would verify our faith; show us that we must be perfect in our love, if we would be meet to live for ever!

But charity is declared, thirdly, to surpass, in duration, every other gift of the Spirit. "Charity never faileth, but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." And again; "Now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." We thus see, that the charity, without which faith is vain, prophecy is vain, alms-giving is vain; the charity which works in the heart mightily, and spiritualizes the whole conversation, is a charity which endureth beyond the duration of any thing earthly, and in another world never faileth. In addition then to its fruits in the present life—in addition to the good it does—the evil it prevents—the happiness it feels and communicates—charity is a fit and meet inhabitant of the heavenly world, and is the essence of God himself.

Who then is the servant of Christ most fitted for a place in a world of love? Who but he, that is perfect in love? Who but he that loves without ceasing; loves under the greatest disadvantage; loves to his own discomfort; loves because Christ

¹ 1 John iv., 16.

loved him, and gave him a commandment to love his brethren¹? Would we be deemed meet partakers of that heavenly company? Would we fit ourselves for a communion with glorified spirits, and with him above all who is love itself? Would we love as we would wish to be loved, love, with a love that shall endure; love, as do the angels of God? Let us love, as exactly as possible, after the Apostle's admonition, loving because we believe; loving with intensity of love; loving in deed and in truth².

THE FIRST DAY OF LENT, COMMONLY CALLED ASH-WEDNESDAY.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Joel ii., 12 to 17.*

12 Turn ye *even* to me, saith the Lord, with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:

13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

14 Who knoweth if he will return, and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; *even* a meat-offering and a drink-offering unto the Lord your God.

15 Blow the trumpet in Zion,

sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly:

16 Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts; let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.

17 Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?

It was on a day solemnly set apart, that Christian penitents in the primitive times assembled. They devoted the day to no other purpose, than that for which it was set apart; and gave up all its hours to the welfare and care of their souls. They continued in prayer to God, they poured out their hearts' desire, they confessed their grievous sin, and acknowledged with tears and supplications, that Jesus Christ, and he alone, could save. There is still a solemn day, a solemn supplication, a solemn assembly once a year. There is a Judge before whose tribunal we must some time appear, who hates sin with a perfect hatred; a Saviour who washes it away, and a Comforter who speaks peace, hope, and mercy to the souls of the sincerely penitent. There is a service, a form of supplication, a method of humilia-

¹ John xv., 12.

² 1 John iii., 18.

tion, a call to confession, and a voice that cries, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand¹." But there is no assembling of *penitents*, and few, very few, assemble at all. And the few that assemble are not, it is to be feared, penitents, but formalists, appearing to sorrow, but scarcely attempting to pray, kneeling in a posture of humility, but not in humility of spirit.

The solemn day has now nearly reached its close, and the words that have been spoken in the house of God, whether spoken in formality or sincerity, have now "entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." And what is the result? Have we found acceptance as penitents, as sinners, as supplicants for mercy? Or is the negligence of our demeanour on this day to be added to the long list of our other negligences, keeping us further from acceptance than ever, and confirming us in all former impenitence? This is now the question proposed, and we must not shrink from it. The Epistle for the day shows us, with a sufficient degree of plainness, that we have a duty of this kind to do, and how it may best be done. Let us then attend for a short time to its statements; and God grant, that both he who has hitherto gone through the service of this day with indifference and he who has hitherto disregarded it altogether, may alike profit by them.

First, then, the Prophet says, "*Turn ye.*" And, wherefore, were the Lord's people called upon to do this? What was their way of life, that they should have need to turn? What course must they take in future? What course must they forego for ever? There must be a thorough change of heart. Present habits, present feelings, present pursuits, present predilections, whatsoever they be, must be laid aside. There must be a radical change, a complete renovation. "Old things must pass away. All things must become new."

Further light is thrown upon this subject, secondly, by the character of the change implied by the Prophet. "*Turn ye even to me*, saith the Lord." It is evident from the context, that the persons addressed had been sinners against the Lord, grievous sinners against him previously. They had rebelled against the Lord. Through sin they had been utterly at variance with him, entirely alienated from him, despisers of his goodness, enemies of his righteousness, rebels against his power, wanderers from his fold. And what must they now do? They must turn from that hardened state; turn even unto the Lord. They must forsake

¹ Matt. iii., 2.

their habit of sinning, and become new men. They must honour what they once despised—love what they hated—fear what they defied—seek what they regarded with aversion—return to the fold from whence they wandered—in a word, be exactly opposite, in every respect, and particularly with regard to the Lord, to what they had been before. And again, they must turn to the Lord with *all their heart*, not merely appear to turn, but turn in reality; not merely turn for a time, but turn for ever. The heart must not be divided between two masters, God and Mammon, Christ and Belial, the one thing needful and some sinful propensity. No. Every thing of the nature of sin must be wholly sacrificed. The soul must be the absorbing interest, and Christ must be all in all.

But once more, the people are enjoined to “turn unto the Lord,” not only with all their heart, but “with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; to rend their heart and not their garments, and so to turn unto the Lord their God.” There must be certain external marks of humiliation, certain internal expressions of sorrow. The people must not only turn, but turn with mourning hearts and sorrowing countenances. Their sin has offended a just and holy God. Their ways have been very grievous; their transgressions almost too sore to be forgiven. But a God who might have punished, is merciful; condescends to expostulate; vouchsafes to postpone his judgments. And the people awakened out of sleep, unconsciously on the brink of a precipice, estranged and alienated from their Father, but, before all hope is gone, coming to themselves, are invited to express what they feel, to acknowledge their utter insufficiency, deplore their helpless ignorance, and bow themselves, in all humility and penitence, before the mercy-seat of him who is waiting to be gracious.

But further, it is implied in this appeal, that *all* must join in the solemn act of humiliation. The people, the congregation, the elders, the children, the bridegroom, the bride, the priests, all must for a time forego their occupations; all must in the emergency forget their particular position, and unite in one general supplication. Even the priests, officially holy, must confess to a personal uncleanness. Even the priests, wont to praise, and bless, and intercede, and expound, according as need required and the statute of the sanctuary ordained, must now confine themselves to the one mournful office of “weeping between the porch

and the altar," and saying, "Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach."

It now only remains to notice, thirdly and lastly, the probable results of the course recommended by the Prophet. "The Lord your God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return, and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meat-offering and a drink-offering unto the Lord your God." Upon a true and faithful repentance, begun, continued, and carried on after this humble and contrite fashion, but not without a final and thorough turning, in all the after-life, from the ways and works of wickedness, will a gracious and merciful God forgive the grievous backslidings thus repented of, and remember them no more. Such is the tenor of the Prophet's encouragement, such the cheering purpose of his message. Forgiveness will follow penitence, and wrath be exchanged for mercy.

And does not this teach us many things that we seem to forget, read us an admonitory lesson, tell us a fearful tale? What are we about, that we do not more generally, more habitually, more reverently take heed to this particular service of Ash-Wednesday, and own our peculiar position and character as sinners? Some of us may be great and habitual sinners; "dead in trespasses and sins¹;" "drowned in destruction and perdition²." Some of us may be occasional sinners, wavering like a wave of the sea, halting between two opinions; following whithersoever any lust entices us. And some of us may be truly converted, but not sufficiently watchful, not sufficiently alive to the necessity of improvement and progress, not advancing with sufficiently quick steps and generally regular diligence toward the highest summit of perfection. Do we not then all seem called upon, on the day of this solemn fast, to repent of some former transgression and turn from some evil way? Yes, verily: and we have the greatest encouragement. Jesus Christ has died for sinners. His precious blood atones for sin. His grace is sufficient to help our infirmities. He bids us, nay welcomes us to his presence. He calls us his redeemed children. He beckons us to his heavenly throne. Let us arise and go unto him. Let us fall down before him. Nay, let us abide with him.

¹ Eph. ii., 1.

² 1 Tim. vi., 9.

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE EPISTLE. 2 Cor. vi., 1 to 10.

WE then, *as workers together with him*, beseech *you* also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

2 (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)

3 Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed:

4 But in all *things* approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

5 In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;

6 By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,

7 By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,

8 By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and *yet* true;

9 As unknown, and *yet* well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed;

10 As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and *yet* possessing all things.

"The grace of God" here spoken of, is "the grace of God which bringeth salvation¹," the free offer of reconciliation to lost and perishing sinners, "the gift by grace which is by one man Jesus Christ, and hath abounded unto many²." This "grace of God," the Apostle here beseeches his people, "not to receive in vain," and tells them that their acceptance of it should be immediate, the present being the only really accepted time and day of salvation.

But before we can exhort our brethren not to receive the grace of God in vain, we must clearly understand ourselves, and be able to convince others, what it is, and what should follow from it. "The grace of God" here spoken of, is, as we have before stated, the grace or favour that bringeth salvation, the free offer of reconciliation to lost and perishing sinners, "the gift by grace, which is by one man Jesus Christ, and hath abounded unto many."

What is it then, what must it be, to receive this grace *aright*? Evidently it is, to make it minister, so far as we have the power, to the end for which it was sent; to seek the salvation it has brought; to accept the free offer it has made; to treasure up and turn to good account the gift it has made abundant unto many. And how may a man essay to do this?

¹ Tit. ii., 11.

² Rom v., 15.

How may he seek salvation, accept reconciliation, and make most truly available to his own spiritual needs, the gift of everlasting life? The way is laid down in the Gospel, and it is simple, plain, and discernible.

A man must believe himself to be a great sinner, and being satisfied of this, proceed further, and act like a convinced sinner. He must bring himself, through the power of divine grace, so completely under a sense of sin, as at once to be enabled to close with the offer of reconciliation through Christ, to appear before the footstool of his heavenly Father as a prodigal but penitent son, and receiving his gracious forgiveness, follow him ever after, whithersoever he goeth. He must be brought to pray fervently, read continually, examine himself faithfully, use the means of grace, mortify the evil affections, resist temptation, watch with diligence, and notwithstanding an occasional backsliding, increase in knowledge and grow stronger in faith evermore. This it is to receive the grace of God aright, a grace that first comes in baptism, departs when the baptismal covenant is broken, returns with the return of a right mind, and continues with him who never swerves from his engagements, unto his life's end.

But how fearful a thing does it seem to receive all this grace *in vain*, either by entangling ourselves in pollutions, from which we had escaped, or by never once heeding any call to repentance! What a slight do we put upon God! How grievously must we disappoint his purposes concerning us! How inevitably must we set up obstacles in the way of our own happiness! How completely must we nullify, so far as individual cases go, the important object for which Christ came into the world and died upon the cross!

But before we enter more fully into the admonitory part of the subject, let us see what the Apostle here says of himself and his fellow-labourers, whom God had placed in the highly honourable position of "workers together with him" in the business of the ministry. He reminds the Corinthians of the good example set them by their teachers. He tells them of the inoffensive lives, the patience in afflictions, "the pureness," the kindness, "the long-suffering" of the messengers of the Gospel of Christ. He tells them of the spiritual guidance under which they acted, of the "love unfeigned" thus taught them, of "the word of truth" thus made mighty in their mouth. He tells them of God's power exerted in their favour, of his "armour of righteousness" defending them from harm, of "the honour and dis-

honour," "the evil report and good report," through which, thus protected, they had been enabled to pass, not only without mischance, but with glorious triumph. And finally, he sums up his statement with a most glowing and eloquent description of the seeming afflictions, but real victories of the champions of the cross. And with what apparent contradiction, but positive truth, does he recite the strange story of their lives. They were called "deceivers," but they were "true" and faithful. They were taunted as "unknown," but in their ministrations they were "well known." They seemed often on the point of death, but as often they escaped with life. They were "chastened" of the Lord, but it was not a chastisement that "killed." They drank deep of the cup of sorrow, but it was a sorrow that gave foretaste of joy. They were "poor" in worldly estate, but they had that to bestow which conferred more inestimable blessing than a world's wealth. In themselves they had positively "nothing," but in Christ they were literally possessors of "all things." All these things the converts could see. Very good indeed must have been the cause, very great indeed the might, which could have exacted and sustained such sacrifices. That doctrine must be heavenly which could keep its promoters, so sorely tried, from falling. That example should be imitated by disciples which was thus exhibited in Apostles. It was thus that the Apostles preached. It was thus that their people should believe.

And is this a mode of argument only suitable to persecuting times? Is there not still a ministry amongst us? And is it not still subjected to reproach? And does it not still bear with patience? Is it not a ministry poor, and yet rich, sorrowful, yet rejoicing, blamed, yet approved? Are we not all served by such a ministry? Do we not all see what it suffers, believe what it teaches, mark what it does? Do we not in particular feel convinced that it works together with God, that the minister's work is God's work, that the people's servant is God's servant, that his word is often blessed, his office worthy of being upheld?

And how shall we best fulfil the purposes to which this apostolical ministry tends, and for which it exists? Simply, in the first place, by taking heed to its godly admonitions, and not receiving the grace, which it is continually bestowing, in vain; remembering that God works with it; that God first ordained it; that God still sanctifies its undertaking, and prospers its work. None need be ignorant while such a ministry teaches.

None ought to sin while such grace abounds. Shall a Saviour come into a world, die for a world, proclaim salvation throughout a world, and any in that world not heed him, any in that world not heed him with impunity? Oh, never let any of us thus trifle with our precious souls, thus waste our days of grace, thus contend with him who died for us! Let us not so completely blast our own happiness, and render nugatory a Redeemer's work, but gladly take the hand of his ministering servant now stretched out to help us, hear his voice with meekness, follow his steps with readiness. That ministering servant, like his brother of old, is often blamed—often thwarted—often despised. Let it in future be the glory of those among whom he ministers to value, to honour, to love, to encourage him, to esteem him for his work's sake, and pray, above all, for a blessing on his labours. To many he may seem a deceiver, unknown, "miserable, poor, blind, naked." But be it our part, as his people, to show, by the profitable use we make of his ministry, that he preaches the truth, is well known amongst us, has ground of real rejoicing, enriches many souls, possesses all things worth the possession, and above all, ministers not the grace of God in vain.

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE EPISTLE. 1 *Thess.* iv., 1 to 8.

WE beseech you, brethren, and exhort *you* by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

2 For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

3 For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

4 That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;

5 Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

6 That no *man* go beyond and defraud his brother in *any* matter; because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

7 For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

8 He therefore that despiseth despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

The Apostle here reminds his converts at Thessalonica of the obligation they were under to profit by his ministry. He tells them, that they had "received" of him and his brother Apostles, "how they ought to walk and to please God," that they

"knew what commandments had been given them by the Lord Jesus," and that thus instructed and thoroughly furnished unto edification, they should not only "walk by the same rule and mind the same thing whereunto they had already attained," but "press forward toward the mark," and "abound more and more." He then particularizes two propensities, to which, in all probability, they had evinced a predisposition; and to these he directs their especial attention. Having done this, and in the plainest manner, he enforces his exhortation, in conclusion, by arguments of a most constraining kind, which we will urge in their proper place.

First, then, "*commandments* have been given us by the Lord Jesus." Jesus Christ, in dying for us, did not permit us to be idle. He died indeed for the sinner, but the sinner was commanded to die unto sin. There is no salvation for any who obey not the commandments, believe only in name, and live as though there were no commandments, no obligations, no restraints, no excitements to action but the counsels of their own will. The same Gospel which publishes salvation, shows sinners "how they ought to walk and to please God." It is the end and aim of the whole system; and we can no more think of seeing the Lord without holiness, than expect to obtain any earthly privilege without the preparatory qualification. And the doctrine of the Gospel is, as the Apostle suggests, familiar to us. We "*know* what commandments have been given us by the Lord Jesus." There is no mystery, no difficulty. All is clear, plain, and straightforward; "he may run that readeth¹."

But it is to be observed further, that the same word which is clear in itself, practical in its tendency, spiritual in its source, accessible and intelligible to all, is unfolded in all its features by frequent exposition. What the Apostles once taught, other ministers continue to teach. It is their office to remove ignorance, prevent misconception, offer unwelcome counsel, train uninformed infancy, in things pertaining to the soul, in things pertaining to God. And it is their office to do this daily, periodically, unceasingly, in the name of Christ, with the word of truth, in the private house, in the great congregation.

And what do we say to these things? How do the truths of the Gospel find us? How do they generally leave us? Do we hear, or do we forbear? Do we remember, or do we forget? Do we believe, or do we not believe? Do we feel, or do we

¹ Habak. ii., 2.

resist the force of truth? Do we turn to good account, or no account, the grace bestowed upon us? Some of the Lord's commandments have been set forth this day. Are they already forgotten? Or are they beginning to bring forth fruit? Let us ever take heed how we hear, and "the Lord give us understanding in all things¹."

But there are one or two commandments in particular, which the Apostle specifies; and to these let us devote attention. There is a commandment to "abstain from fornication." And it is declared to be God's will and man's sanctification, that he should abstain from it. He must "possess his vessel in sanctification and honour." "God has not called him unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." And if he is unclean, he is "even as the Gentiles which know not God." These are cogent reasons for abstinence from fleshly lusts, and they should have weight with all. But is this at present the case with all? Does the will of God actually constrain all in this or in any thing? Do all regard it as authoritative? And even if they do according to its ordinance, is it not often from some worldly and secondary motive, and not from a due sense of its pre-eminent and paramount obligations? Yes, if the truth must be spoken (and wherefore should it not?) this is often the case. Men abstain from fleshly lusts because it is not respectable. Men follow fleshly lusts, although it is not respectable, because their hearts are hardened. But what saith the Scripture, that Scripture which professing Christians, even those who hold the truth in unrighteousness, in appearance follow? It teacheth that, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we must live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world," looking for him who "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works²."

Further, a fear to be made like unto the Gentiles should constrain us to be temperate in all things. In what do the Gentiles who know not God, and the disciples of Jesus who have been made intimately acquainted with him, so completely differ, as in a knowledge of right and wrong, of good and evil, of truth and error? And in what, consequently, ought they so completely to differ as in their *practice*, the practice that results from these opposite principles, and marks these opposite characters? Is this the case with us? Are we, as it were, shamed

¹ 2 Tim. ii., 7.

² Tit. ii., 12, 14.

into a right state of feeling in such matters by the consciousness of our position as disciples of Christ, by a regard to our high obligations; by a sense of our peculiar privileges? Or are we still, so far as regards the lust of concupiscence, or perchance some other lust, "even as the Gentiles which know not God"—in no respect better than they—and in some things immeasurably worse? Let us take heed betimes to our spiritual condition, and trifle not too long with the grace of Christ, lest at length it leave us for ever.

The Apostle singles out another important duty, even the duty of justice, and enjoins us not to violate it. Let no man who has been admitted to Christian privileges, depart so far from his principles of "sanctification and honour," as to "go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter." And let him be deterred from so heinous a sin, if he cannot be deterred in any other way, by a recollection that the Lord, the God of justice, will visit it with vengeance; that concupiscence, a Gentile lust, is the parent of injustice; and that the contemner of him who proclaims this truth in the name of God, is a contemner of God himself.

Who, then, amongst us pleads guilty to this charge? Who "goes beyond and defrauds his brother in any matter?" Remember the words, "*in any matter.*" It makes no difference what the thing is, if it be fraud, or an approach to fraud, or the appearance of fraud. Any kind of extortion or undue advantage, or endeavour to serve ourselves at the expense of another, is here prohibited, whatever it be. The Lord is the avenger of concupiscence of any kind, and will not overlook it in any shape, be it "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life¹." Wheresoever it exists, it has been permitted to gain its position by a heart that has "done despite to the spirit of grace²," and refused to hear the voice of the Lord's appointed minister. And shall a disciple of Jesus go on for a length of time in a course of wilful disobedience, inexcusable even in a Gentile, and still find acceptance at last? No, indeed. The Lord, as we have seen, is an avenger. He has died to save, but he is appointed to punish. He is the sinner's friend, but the sinner's judge—the father, but the master—the advocate, but the God.

This day has his minister pleaded with us in his name. He has besought us by the Lord Jesus, bidden us in the name of an avenging God, warned us of his will, told us of his grace, re-

¹ Thess. iv., 5.² 1 John ii., 16.³ Heb. x., 29.

mind us of the holy calling of a believer in Jesus Christ. Let us hesitate no longer, but at once accept the proffered help, and lay aside the besetting sin, taking shame to ourselves for ever having been as those that know not God, humbling ourselves at the foot of the cross for the uncleanness that has profaned a most holy vocation, and promising henceforth, with the help of God's grace, and with the assurance of his pardon, to walk in newness of life.

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE EPISTLE. *Eph. v., 1 to 14.*

BE ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;

2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;

4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

6 Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.

7 Be not ye therefore partakers with them.

8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)

10 Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*.

12 For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.

13 But all things that are reprobated are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

14 Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

The relation of father is one of the most endearing in nature; and it is a relation in which God stands, in some sense, to all of us. He is the Father of all, as the sole supreme Creator of all, the Omnipotent, who brought all into being, brings all into being, and in every variety of condition in which man can exist, must ever be "the Lord and Giver of life."

But the Apostle does not here address his Ephesian brethren as in that general sense "dear children," although, in common with the rest of mankind, they participated in the relationship which all men bear to their common father, God. And why

would the Apostle refrain from addressing the Ephesians as God's "dear children" in this sense? Because, as creatures, they were fallen, corrupt, reprobate, and in need of a Saviour, a spiritual Creator, an atoning High Priest, to blot out their great transgressions, and restore them to the favour of God. And it was only as men who had availed themselves of this method of reconciliation with God, that the Ephesians could be called "dear children," and exhorted, as such, to be "followers of God." And although the whole race of mankind were still, notwithstanding their lost estate, the children, in a certain sense, of a justly offended God, and many, like the runaway slave Onesimus, had "perchance departed for a season, that he might receive them again for ever¹," they could have no claim to the title which God reserved for those, and those only, who had become his by adoption.

The great point, then, at which all disciples of Christ should aim, is to become really "dear children" of their heavenly Father. And how shall they be likely to attain that point? By being "followers of God." Thus, and thus alone, shall they be children, "dear children," of the spiritual Parent of the sanctified, and obtain all the privileges of the most favoured heirs of promise. Some of us, I fear, are not at present "followers of God." Others, very probably, to the extent that human frailty will permit, are so.

First, then, as the greatest point to be attained, how shall those who are not at present followers of God, become so? To set about this important undertaking aright, inquiry must at once be made into the soul's present state. At present the soul is untractable, disobedient, undutiful, and its ways and wilfulness must be amended. It is not a "follower of God," imitating his character, honouring his authority, walking in his footsteps. The divine parental voice is unheard. The love of a crucified Saviour finds no answer in the heart. A home is abandoned, a child estranged, a Father lost, and all for sin. Although constrained by every loving obligation, the self-willed disciple walks not in a like love. "He loves not his brother whom he hath seen," neither heeds he his proffers of love. He cares not for his soul or his body, rejoices not with him in his joys, mourns not for him in his sorrows, vouchsafes him neither sympathy nor service, makes for him no sacrifice, extends to him no fellowship. Nay more, perchance he is the bitterest enemy of some of his

¹ Philemon 15.

brethren, does them all the ill he can, quarrels with them, speaks evil of them, persecutes them unceasingly. And how can he love a whit more "God whom he hath not seen"¹? Yea, he loves him not at all, he keeps not any of his sayings, gives him not his heart, serves him not with ardour, thanks him not for mercies, sees him not in trials, comes not to him, falls not down before him as a perishing sinner, and takes not any interest in the day, the house, the name, the kingdom, the glory of him who gives him all he has received. Can such a man love him whom he treats so scornfully, so ungratefully? Love usually shows its fruits, and evinces signs of life; but this man gives good evidence that he has it not in him. But what is the example thus slighted, thus not followed? "Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice unto God for a sweet-smelling savour²." Can there be greater love than this, more vivid portraiture than this of zeal for the salvation of sinners, and disinterested desire to serve them?

Let those amongst us, who at present are not "followers of God," awaken out of sleep at this sight of God's glory shining round about them, take up their cross in love, and follow their Lord with joy. Let love beget love, and grace bind to gratitude. And oh, let there be confession, prayer, contrition, and thorough turning of the heart unto the Lord, at the sight of the many marvels he hath done for us. Let us exert every effort, and spare no pains to be at last found of Christ, not having our own righteousness, but his—not living unto ourselves, but unto him—and then in due time we shall be his "dear children," dear because dutiful, children because conformed to his image, and obedient to his doctrine, his will, his commandments, in all things.

But there is yet another particular, wherein some amongst us may err and not follow God. And how is this error committed, and what may it be? "Foolish and hurtful lusts" obtain possession of the soul, and "drown it in destruction and perdition³." The natural man is impure, unclean, unholy, full of all inordinate desires and corrupt communications; and in these things it has the mastery, and follows not God. "The cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful⁴." By impurity in thought, in life, and in conversation, the soul makes shipwreck of its faith, and by degrees departs from first princi-

¹ 1 John iv., 20. ² Eph. v., 2. ³ 1 Tim. vi., 9. ⁴ Matt. xiii., 22.

ples. In a word, the unstable disciple becomes, by a very speedy process, so far as purity is concerned, an inheritor of wrath, an enemy of righteousness, a child of the devil.

But what sheweth the example, which this ungodly professor ought, nay, as a baptized Christian, is *pledged* to follow? It sheweth a life of faultless purity, which none could convince of sin, none turn aside after Satan; even the life of him, whose purity atones for man's impurities, and in whose sight the heavens are unclean, angels are imperfect, and even impure thoughts are sins. And must not Christ's disciple be conformed to him in purity, before he can lay claim to his love? Yes, he must cease to have "fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness," and not even make mention of sins of impurity. He must, in fact, by repentance come out from among such things and be separate, and bringing even every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, become henceforth, so far as regards purity and every other quality connected with God, the docile, tractable, dutiful child of his heavenly Father. Thus will he become truly endeared to him, and in the end be a meet partaker, through Christ, of the heavenly inheritance.

Little need be said to those, in conclusion, who are already, both in love and purity, "followers of God," and so far as human frailty will permit, consistently and systematically so. Their privileges are all comprised under that brief but comprehensive and encouraging title, "dear children." As such, they "have all and abound." They have more than heart can think, or tongue express. They have that love of the best of beings, which nothing can quench, nothing can turn away; a love that waxes not cold, waxes not lifeless, waxes not feeble; but endures longer than life endures, and gives in the present life and reserves for the next, blessings which man cannot with his utmost ingenuity anticipate, or with his liveliest gratitude repay. Let all followers of God, then, as dear children, persevere in their work begun, persevere in faith, persevere in love, persevere in purity, persevere in every thing that becometh children of God; and then, thus animated, thus supported, thus kept stedfast unto the end, they will be entitled to hear, yea entitled to answer, in the great day of account, the Redeemer's summons to his people: "Come, ye blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world¹."

¹ Matt. xxv., 34.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE EPISTLE. *Gal. iv.*, 21 to the end.

21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?

22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free-woman.

33 But he *who was* of the bond-woman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman *was* by promise.

24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.

25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

27 For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him *that was born* after the Spirit, even so *it is* now.

30 Nevertheless what saith the Scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.

31 So, then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

The whole drift and purport of this portion of Scripture is, to show the everlasting repeal by Christ of the Mosaic ceremonial law, and consequently the cessation of all necessity, on the part of his disciples, of observing it. In order to enforce this doctrine in the most striking manner, the Apostle refers his fellow-believers to the chapter in Genesis, which contains the account of Hagar's expulsion from the tents of Abraham, and the substitution of Isaac for Ishmael¹. He calls this history, in reference to the subject before him, an allegory, or figurative mode of explaining what he wished to render intelligible, namely, the character of each of those systems of religion, respectively, which then prevailed in the world. And how does he do this? Ishmael, "the son of the bondwoman," is made to represent the Mosaic ceremonial law, which imposed a burden on the soul and conscience too heavy to be borne. Isaac, "the son of the free-woman," is made to represent the more spiritual dispensation of the Gospel, which "abolished the law of commandments contained in ordinances²," and introduced in its stead a service of perfect freedom. And further, Ishmael, "born after the flesh," is made to represent the Israelite, whose covenant was eventu-

¹ Gen. xxi., 9—21 inclusive.

² Eph. ii., 15.

ally to be "cast out." And Isaac, "born after the Spirit," is made to represent the Christian, who is to be an inheritor of the promises of the Gospel.

As heirs of this "better covenant," then, "established upon better promises," we, the disciples of Christ and children of promise, are in the situation of Isaac. We are different, so far as our system goes, to the professors of any other religion. Forms and ceremonies are no longer the main features of true religion, although still, to a certain extent, necessary. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father" now is, to "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world¹." Faith, steadfast, and unfeigned, in the promises of God through Christ, is now the first step to acceptance; the foundation on which works must stand, and prayer be offered. Spirituality must be the essence of the form, "hunger and thirst after righteousness" the substance of the ceremony. We must be careful not to place too much dependance on the mere mechanical act of going to church, partaking of the communion, or hearing a sermon, things very right in themselves, but principally right as means towards an end.

Regarding them in this light, we shall, doubtless, with the aid of God's grace, accomplish their object and work out their purpose, for we shall confess because we feel our weakness; ask because we wish to obtain; give thanks because we are sensible of benefits; communicate because we love the Redeemer; hear because we are told of redemption. And the result will doubtless be cheering, and answer our fullest expectations. Encouragement will abound, reconciliation will stand prominently forward, and an atonement open wide the gates of grace, of righteousness, of heaven, to every "son of the bondwoman," who desires in sincerity to be "heir with the son of the freewoman." Isaac will represent the dispensation under which this happens; but he will represent still more forcibly, him, for whom it works such glorious privileges. Blest in his spiritual birthright, the true worshipper will find, on each returning Sabbath, a continually returning supply of helps, lights, and motives. And he will arise from all his devotions and acts of worship, more thoroughly resolved than ever to resist his great adversary the devil, and to walk forward on his way, rejoicing.

But there is another view of this subject, in the second

¹ James v., 27.

place, to which, hitherto, we have not more than incidentally alluded, but to which we all ought to pay, before we conclude our meditations on this allegory, a more than incidental attention. We live under a dispensation, it is true, which is well and truly shadowed out under the figure of "the son of the freewoman." "The yoke is easy, the burden light¹," whether we regard the doctrines or the duties, the comforts or the promises, of the Gospel. And though death, eternal death, is undoubtedly threatened, it is only as a *contingent* punishment, contingent upon our resolute and obstinate refusal to believe in a meek Saviour and a mild Gospel, aided as we are by so many and gracious heavenly influences and holy encouragements.

But although the dispensation under which the Christian lives is spiritual, the Christian himself may not be spiritual. There was the bondage of "the son of the bondwoman," the bondage of the Israelite under the yoke of forms and ceremonies; but there is, has been, and ever will be, the bondage of sin, under which the Christian, privileged as he really is, may be sorely and bitterly brought. The bondage of sin is a bondage inherited by the whole world; inherited by Ishmael, inherited by Isaac, inherited by the Israelite, inherited by the Christian. And it is the most grievous, the most dangerous, the most difficult to be shaken off, of all bondage. And it is a bondage under which a man may even partially labour, when he worships in the Lord's house, communicates at the Lord's table, hears truth from the Lord's minister; and worships, and communicates, and hears thus habitually.

And how and when may we judge ourselves to be under the yoke, more or less, of this bondage? When we do what we ought not to do, and leave undone what we ought to do. When we live in the habitual commission of any known sin, and feel ourselves unable, unwilling, unprepared to abandon it. When the principal time is spent, the best talents employed, the whole heart engaged, in the world's service. When idle amusements, evil company, profane revellings, find ready welcome and unyielding compliance, almost as soon as they present themselves. When the things a man would, those he does not, and the things a man would not, those he does. When he yields to temptations, which others resist. When he struggles with a sin, and it overcomes him. When he makes resolutions against a sin, and cannot keep them. When he abstains from a sin for a time,

¹ Matt. xi., 30.

but returns to it again. When the sweetest promises and sores threatenings are alike powerless as preventives. When sab-baths, sacraments, prayers, sermons, are all equally distasteful. When grace, atonement, conversion, salvation, and such like holy things, are objects of indifference, aversion, ridicule, contempt. When a serious illness, a heavy bereavement, or even a deathbed, fail to make impression on the slumbering soul. All these are signs, more or less palpable, of spiritual bondage; and as long as that bondage continues, so long is he, who wears the chain, a slave, although seeming to be free. He lives under a dispensation, even believes in a dispensation, which is to all intents and purposes a dispensation of freedom; and yet he is as perfect a bonds-lave as Hagar, or any other child of servitude.

And would it not be well for us, in appearance the children of the freewoman, to ask ourselves, how we are situated in this respect, whether we are, in truth and sincerity, the children of the freewoman, or whether we are only so in form and appearance? The signs whereby we may know this have been stated. Let us reconsider them. Let us apply them to our several cases, and decide according to truth. Let it never be forgotten, above all, that the spiritual dispensation under which we live, leaves us, so far as sin goes, without excuse. Unlike the Mosaic dispensation, it abounds in liberal allowances, merciful helps, plain revelations, free forgivenesses, gracious promises. The believer, if he goes wrong, goes wrong with his eyes open. He has "a light for his feet and a lamp for his paths¹." The life, the liberty, the glory, the adoption of the Gospel, encompass him on every side. His strongest enemy may be overcome. He has a way to escape from bondage; and the way is known to him. At a word his chains will fall off, and in heart, in will, in understanding, in power of action, he will be free. The truth will make him free. He will be guided into all truth, and will be free indeed. And having thus by repentance sighed for freedom, and thus by Christ escaped from bondage, he will triumph by the power of the Spirit, and laugh his old enemy to scorn. And "neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate him from that love of God, which he will have in Christ Jesus his Lord²."

¹ Ps. cxix., 105.

² Rom. viii., 38, 39.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE EPISTLE. *Heb. ix., 11 to 15.*

11 Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;

12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*.

13 For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:

14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

15 And for [this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions *that were* under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

The more nearly we approach the anniversary of the death and passion of Christ, the more strongly marked becomes the evidence, in our Church services, of the character of the event it commemorates. This is the case here. The event commemorated on Good Friday, is the death and passion of Christ; and the tendency of the Epistle for this day is to show, how far superior that death and passion are, as a sacrifice for sin, to the ancient Levitical sacrifice. The Levitical sacrifice was a slain beast, and it "sanctified to the purifying of the flesh." It was a sacrifice for the sins of others, was in itself a sinless sacrifice, and as such, made *temporary* atonement.

But Christ was a very different sacrifice. He was a sinless man, and he was the mighty God; and so "by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;" not by "the blood of others," but by his own blood; not "year by year continually," but once for all, "he hath obtained eternal redemption for us." Thus man atoned for man, cleansed both flesh and spirit, died for the "redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament," and procured for all "the promise of eternal inheritance." And Christ was both High Priest and sacrifice, temple and offering, and final, perpetual, all-sufficient atonement. And so indirectly are we led to conclude, that on no human merits, earthly ordinances, or fleshly devices, must man depend for atonement, but simply on Christ alone. The blood of bulls and goats was insufficient, the blood of sinful

man was unavailable, the profoundest human wisdom and philosophy could never invent a method of redemption. God, whose wrath was to be appeased, could alone provide the offering, and that offering was the blood of his Son.

What a blessed thing it is that Christ, "a High Priest of good things to come," has actually come, and that we do not live under the dispensation which preceded his coming; when all was dark, typical, and unfulfilled; but in times of light and knowledge. Instead of a High Priest who "could not continue by reason of death¹," and "had infirmity," and "needed to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, then for the people's²," we have a High Priest who is "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners;" who offered up sacrifice once for all, "when he offered up himself," and is "consecrated for evermore³." Instead of "a tabernacle made with hands," and in its nature "a worldly sanctuary," where prayer was wont to be made, sacrifice to be performed, and service to be offered, we have "a tabernacle not made with hands, not of this building⁴," even heaven, where Christ, having entered in once, ever liveth to make intercession for us. Instead of "the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean," continually poured out before the Lord for "the purifying of the flesh," we have the blood of Christ, which of itself obtained eternal redemption for us. And instead of bodily purification from ceremonial uncleanness, we have our souls "cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit," and our "conscience purged from dead works to serve the living God." Spirit now takes the place of form, contrition of sacrifice, substance of shadow, light of darkness, reconciliation of wrath, life of death, blessing of curse, hope of despair.

We need be under no apprehension now, if we will only believe. We need be in no doubt now, if we will only consult the oracles of God, and put faith in what they tell us. We need not take the trouble now of numbering the feasts and fasts and observances we have kept, if we will only strive to live, in every point, as becometh the Gospel of Christ. We need not now be wasting our time, and perplexing our thoughts, in looking for a Messiah, if we will give heed to the evidences which prove that he is already come. We need not now be mystifying ourselves with obscure types and unfulfilled prophecies and

¹ Heb. vii., 23.

² Ibid. 27, 28.

³ Ibid. 26 to 28.

⁴ Ibid. ix., 11 to 14.

ill-understood ceremonies, if we will only commit our souls unto him, who as a faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, hath abolished them all, and "brought in everlasting righteousness¹." Every thing necessary to salvation do we now know; every thing not necessary we need not to know perfectly. We know that we are "by nature carnal, and sold under sin²." We know that, constituted as we are, we are not able of ourselves to help ourselves. We know that our sufficiency under any circumstances is of God, and of God alone, and that we shall find it, if we will only seek it, and find it in him who is the Mediator of the New Testament. We may see it in our Bibles if we will only read them; hear it from our ministers if we will only heed them; feel it in our hearts if we will only understand them; obtain a full measure of it from him who is the Eternal Spirit, if we will only ask him.

Every thing then being so far now cleared up, every thing needful to know, needful to do, needful to believe, being now plainly set before us, and we no longer in the situation of great sinners, with a law exceeding strict and no deliverance at hand, let us distinguish ourselves from henceforth as a family that makes the most profitable and edifying use of such saving knowledge.

And how shall we so distinguish ourselves? By flying for refuge, every one of us, to that spiritual High Priest, who has atoned for our sins, and who, having once for all "offered himself without spot to God³," will be able to impute a justifying righteousness to all who come to God by him. By guarding ourselves with the present help and eternal consolation which he supplies against every enemy that can assail us, in our intercourse with the world. By making his grace contribute to peace, harmony, diligence, forbearance, and happiness, in our own little world at home. By filling that still smaller world of iniquity, our own individual heart, through the same means, with these "fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ⁴," and so making a church, so far as sanctification goes, in that house. By joining in every prayer we offer, public or private, the name with the notion of Christ; and making every such prayer, whenever or wherever offered, the audible expression of a full heart, the expressive voice of a fruitful life.

And where shall we still fly for refuge to do all these things

¹ Dan. ix., 24.

² Heb. ix., 14.

³ Rom. vii., 24.

⁴ Philip. i., 11.

well—to do all these things at all—to carry all these things on to the end? Even unto him who must be the Finisher as well as Author of our faith. Even unto him who hath not only brought about “a redemption of the transgressions that were under the first Testament,” but hath given to them which are called “the promise of eternal inheritance.” And how are we situated, practically, with regard to this important question? Are we living at the present time like Christians, or disciples of Moses? Are we believing, loving, glorifying God, because of the many and good things he hath done for us, in and through his Son Jesus Christ? Or are we putting our whole trust, so far as God is concerned, in the service of the tabernacle, the observance of stated days, the obedience to outward ordinances, and the correct, orderly, respectable exterior of a decently moral and sober life? Do we give Christ as much prominence in our life and thoughts, as in our creed and profession? Or is it more probable, that there lurks under our cold, formal aspect of ceremonial religion, a heartless indifference about spiritual things? Does there lurk pride, envy, covetousness, wrath, uncharitableness, and a host of forbidden, though not visible propensities fatal to acceptance, and hateful to God? Is there ever in our minds a satisfied assurance, that we are doing our duty, an easy contentedness about the state of our souls, an almost implied reliance on our own merits, and apparent forgetfulness of the merits of Christ? If such be unfortunately the case with any of us, may we presently be brought into a better frame of mind by the influence of the Holy Spirit, and the operation of this passing meditation! And may all of us be spiritually quickened, illuminated, brought to know ourselves thereby! May we be led thereby to make Christ our only hope, doing all that we are enabled to do, and yet not thinking that we do it ourselves, taking Christ’s easy yoke upon our thoughts and affections as well as on our lives and acts of worship, and submitting ourselves wholly in spirit, soul, and body, unto him who loved us, and gave himself for us!

THE SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE EASTER.

THE EPISTLE. *Philip. ii., 5 to 11.*

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus;

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men;

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and

became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth;

11 And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christ Jesus is here set before us as an example that we should follow his steps, and set before us in a manner the most impressive, and in an article the most important. The feature in our Lord's character thus especially recommended to our imitation, is humility; the mode of evincing it thus especially marked out for our consideration is his assumption of our nature, and his death upon the cross. Although in his pre-existent condition he had ever been in the form of God, and therefore needed not to have thought it robbery, an invasion of another's rights, an assumption of what did not already belong to him, to be equal with God: he is nevertheless stated (regardless of his high and divine condition, and only thoughtful of the misery and lost estate of man) to have "made himself of no reputation, taken upon him the form of a servant, appeared in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, to have become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." In token of his approbation of the great love evinced in the project, and of the great humility manifested in the execution of man's redemption, "God also hath highly exalted," in the person of the glorified Jesus, the human nature which he took, and given him a name in his office of Redeemer of the world, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, "every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

And thus we see, not only the humility of Jesus, and the very great extent to which he was willing, in the instance of man's redemption, to carry it out, but the reward which followed it. The example thus manifested, the end for which it was

manifested, the Divine Being who manifested it, the extent to which it was manifested, the reward which followed the manifestation, all are particularly pertinent to the present season, and should not be lost upon us. What, then, should be our course, the course to be adopted by us who are members of the mystical body of Christ? Should it not be a diligent examination of the history of his sufferings, as contained in all the Gospels appointed to be read during the present week? And should it not be, further, as complete an abstraction from the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life, during the time we are thus engaged, as possible? Thus shall we be enabled, if our eyes are not closed, or our ears dull of hearing, to understand some of the wonderful things that were then done for us, the love that was then fully proved, the patience that was then sorely tried, the humility that was then put to its severest test, in a word, "the mind that was in Christ Jesus."

Perchance we may have no opportunity of attending the public service of the Church during the present week, except on this holy day, and on Good Friday. If such be the case, it will do us all good to read in private as many of the week's lessons, epistles, and gospels, as our necessary worldly occupations will allow. We shall thus be doing our souls an important service, in the effort we make to detach them from the world, in the valuable knowledge we shall thereby acquire, and in the clear perception we shall thereby gain of "the mind that is in Christ Jesus."

And what should be the immediate spiritual result of this searching the Scriptures, and of reading, hearing, and discerning from day to day "the mind that was in Christ Jesus?" Should it not be, that the same holy, humble, harmless mind be found in us that was also in Christ Jesus? Should it not be, that when all our weekly reading, weekly meditation, and weekly prayer be over, we rise from the edifying occupation wiser, holier, spiritually stronger men, men more imbued with the mind that was in Christ Jesus, men, in particular, more clothed with that lowliness of mind which makes each esteem other better than himself, and which none practised or taught more forcibly than our example, Christ Jesus?

Let the child learn hereby to be more humble towards the parent, the servant towards the master, the younger towards the elder, and the parent, the master, the elder, towards their God; and then each, in his respective vocation, will spiritually follow

so far as humility goes, the steps that have gone before him, not only towards the mind that was in him who "bore our sins in his own body on the tree," but also towards that heavenly throne, where now and for ever Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And what more fitting method can there be of ascertaining our true position in this respect, than to look at "the mind which was in Christ Jesus," and to see how it operated in our behalf. Christ Jesus, in his state of glory and exaltation, was "in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God." To work out man's salvation he became man, "took upon him the form of a servant," "made himself of no reputation," and eventually "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." He exchanged glory for humiliation, happiness for suffering, dominion for service, divinity for humanity, life for death, and all for man. There could not possibly have been greater condescension, more mortifying self-abasement, more disinterested love. There could not possibly have been contrast more decided, change more marked, variation of position more complete. East and west are not more opposite than God and man, heaven and earth; and great indeed must have been the humility of the God Christ Jesus in becoming the man Christ Jesus, laying aside his dignity, foregoing his claim to pre-eminence, and passing without hesitation the immeasurable barrier that separated him from a world of sinners. Or, as the Psalmist's words spiritualized may signify, "who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, and humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?"

Do any of us hold a really high place in the favour of God? Let us behold with infinite compassion our less spiritually-minded brethren, and not disdain to serve them. Let us descend from our lofty position, visit the haunts of sinners, distrust our own hearts, and help to save perishing souls; bringing down, with the word of God and prayer, all high-mindedness, remembering our own inheritance of a sinful nature, not forgetting, that when we would do good, we have not so far to descend, or such a sacrifice to make as Jesus had to save sinners, and mainly intent in all we think, say, or do for ourselves or the service of others, on the one great end, the glory of God. And must not the sinner, if he would repent, humble himself? And must not the

wise, if he would be in the true sense wise, become a fool, little in his own sight, conscious of great imperfection, great ignorance, great insignificance, yea, of utter worthlessness in the sight of God? And must not the man given to passion, a sin which especially originates in pride, if he would have "the mind that was in Christ Jesus," bring down the pride which at present cannot bear provocation, and, with the help of God's grace, do his best to keep it under? And must not he whose worldly place is high, if he would keep his aspiring thoughts low, take heed unto Christ Jesus, and learn of him, and copy his mind, and emulate his spirit in all things? And are not all these several lessons of humility most forcibly taught, and may they not all be most profitably learnt in the record of Christ's death and passion? Oh, yes! there, as with an iron pen, are they engraven, and thence, as from the place that holds our treasure, may they all, during this holy week, be drawn. Let us, then, whilst this Scripture yet sounds in our ears, hasten thither for instruction, for example, for edification, and our souls shall live.

MONDAY BEFORE EASTER,

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Isai. lxiii.*, 1 to the end.

WHO is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bosrah? this *that is* glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.

2 Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat?

3 I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.

4 For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.

5 And, I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore

mine own arm brought salvation unto me, and my fury it upheld me.

6 And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth.

7 I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness towards the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them, according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses.

8 For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour.

9 In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in

his pity, he redeemed them, and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.

10 But they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.

11 Then he remembered the days of old, Moses and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his Holy Spirit within him?

12 That led them by the right hand of Moses, with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name?

13 That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble?

14 As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest; so didst thou lead thy people to make thyself a glorious name.

15 Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? are they restrained?

16 Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer, thy Name is from everlasting.

17 O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways? and hardened our hearts from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance.

18 The people of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary.

19 We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy Name.

In the animated description of a mighty conqueror, with which this passage from Isaiah opens, it is not difficult to trace the outline of the achievements of the great spiritual Deliverer who accomplished man's salvation, and in his triumph, not obtained without effusion of blood, deprived death of its sting and the grave of its victory. The great enemies of man, the world, the flesh, and the devil, this invincible Saviour may well be said to have "trodden down in his anger and trampled in his fury;" their blood may be said to be "sprinkled upon his garments," and to "stain all his raiment," and their "strength to be brought down to the earth." It was he, and he alone, of all that ever appeared on earth, that "spoke in righteousness." It was he alone that was "mighty to save." "Of the people there was none with him" to assist in the work of redemption. When "the day of vengeance," of vengeance upon all the soul's enemies, was "in his heart," and "the year of his redeemed had come," Jesus Christ "looked, and there was none to help, and he wondered that there was none to uphold." Therefore on the cross and in the death of the cross, "his own single arm brought salvation unto him, and his fury," as a triumphant conqueror, "it upheld him." O how happy a thing it is for us, that in our

extremity we can be supported by the greatness of his strength, and in our worldly defilement, all naked and open before the eyes of an avenging God, may be wrapped in his dyed garments, and be cleansed from all sin!

Sometimes it is lamented, in worldly warfare, that a triumph has been gained, because the conqueror has been slain in the moment of victory. Here the death of the victor is in itself the victory; and the joy, the acclaim, the exultation should be, that Jesus Christ hath been slain, and conquered by his death every obstacle that stood in the way of victory. And thus again the language of the Prophet may be the language of him who believes in the all-sufficient atonement made for sin, with all his heart: "I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses."

When it is remembered, indeed, as remembered it should be by every one, and especially at this time, that the Lord, by his precious blood-shedding, endurance of suffering, and purity of life, and he alone, overcame death, and opened unto his people the gate of everlasting life; the people so ransomed, so delivered, so justified, can scarcely do less than give all the glory to the everlasting name of Jesus.

And must not the thought spring up in every heart, that the sin of each individual amongst us, which the Redeemer, in his love and pity, hath borne and carried, contributed its share toward the burden of his sorrow and the anguish of his soul? And shall a sinner, after that, again "rebel and vex his Holy Spirit?" Yea, rather, will he not, for all his share in the sorrows of so gracious a Benefactor, abhor himself in sackcloth and ashes, and leave off rebellion for ever? Nay, is not this present devotion, and our family devotion on every Sabbath, a tacit acknowledgment, on the part of all of us, of the sin that besets us? And is it not a help toward removing it? And must not the time thus spent be all wasted, if such be not the effect of our communion with God; if we do not enter upon that communion reverently, discreetly, soberly, and in the fear of God, and depart from it more established, strengthened, settled, than before?

Until such be the case, and we are every day bringing some sin to the foot of the cross, and taking the yoke of a dying Saviour in every sense upon us, the concluding prayer of the

Prophet cannot be ours; the worship of the Sabbath will be vain; and the Son of God will become our enemy. But only let any soul that sinneth become sensible of its sin, and rest the burden of it, in lively faith and godly sorrow, on him who atoned for it, and then a reconciled Father will once more "look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of his holiness and of his glory," and the glorious apparel of Christ will cover the sinner, so that he will be able to say, with some degree of truth, in every exercise of his devotion, "I am thine, O Lord; thou art my Father, my Redeemer, thy name is from everlasting!"

TUESDAY BEFORE EASTER.

FOR THE EPISTLE: *Isai. L., 5 to 11.*

5 The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.

6 I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

7 For the Lord God will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.

8 *He* is near that justifieth me: who will contend with me? let us stand together; who is mine adversary? let him come near to me.

9 Behold, the Lord God will help

me; who is he that shall condemn me? Lo, they all shall wax old as a garment: the moth shall eat them up.

10 Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the Name of the Lord, and stay upon his God:

11 Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.

Upon a first perusal of these words of prophecy, the question of the eunuch at once suggests itself, "Of whom speaketh the Prophet this, of himself or of some other man?" And from the apparent applicability of the passage to any teacher sent from God, it might be inferred that he spoke of himself. But it is impossible not to observe some very particular circumstances, which set a special mark upon this prophecy, and make it solely applicable to him who was mightier than any Prophet, and whose shoes' latchet none was ever able to unloose. The indignities to which Jesus Christ was exposed many hundred years

¹ Acts viii., 34, 35; compared with Isai. Liii.

after this prophecy was delivered, and which he bore, intolerable and cruel as they were, with the greatest patience, are the very same as those here named by the Prophet. The meek-silence with which he heard the reproaches; the quiet forbearance with which he endured the spitting, the smiting, and other violent usage of his persecutors, are predicted in the prophecy and recorded in the Gospels, with an almost equal precision; and, while they too accurately prove that the Saviour of the world was indeed a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, they no less powerfully show, that he was indeed a perfect man, and, in particular, a most perfect example of patience.

And what does the Prophet proceed further to assign, as the basis of all this meekness and lowliness of heart? It was "the help of the Lord God;" the presence of "One that justified him." It was this, the power of the Lord God present in him and present with him, that enabled him to "set his face like a flint," to "know that he should not be ashamed," and to challenge the whole world, if it would accept the challenge, to convince him of sin.

The Prophet then draws a moral from the edifying view he had afforded of Christ's endurance of affliction. He tells his countrymen, that in all their affliction, a "trust in the name of the Lord," and a dependence on a justifying God, will be the strongest of inducements for continuing steadfast in the fear of the Lord, and in obedience to "the voice of his servant." And he also tells them, that if they resort in affliction to their own devices, and depend for deliverance on worldly appliances and not on heaven, they shall "eat of the fruit of their own ways, walk in the light of their own fire, and lie down," as if for permanence, "in sorrow."

And may we not gain some spiritual instruction from this example and admonition of the Prophet? The Saviour, whose future sufferings are here shadowed out, is the Saviour who has already appeared and suffered. He is our great example, as well as our great atonement, and a lively faith in the great atonement will enable us to follow more closely, in all trials and tribulations, the steps of the great example. Whither shall we flee but thither, (Christians as we are by profession,) on all such needful occasions? Whither shall we flee but thither, (knit together as we ought to be in one communion and fellowship,) as often

¹ Matt. xxvi, 67; and xxvii, 30.

as we can gather ourselves together? Prostrate with one accord and in one company before the throne of grace, let us bury there, rather than through the intervention of the world, all animosities with one another, all troubles of our own. Let us fall down on our knees, as well as rise up from thence, in an inward as well as outward sense, together, and go on our earthly as well as heavenly pilgrimage, rejoicing and in peace. Trial we shall be sure to have in life, wheresoever our lot may be cast; but let it not be trial self-imposed, forced upon us by our own perverse wills and unruly affections, but rather trial sent for a proof of faith and a test of patience, by a loving heavenly Father. Support we shall often need in trial, but let it not be the support of self-confidence, the stay of self-righteousness. He alone who sends the trial can send the support; and unless we intend to frustrate the purposes of trial, we shall at once adopt the same posture of mind as we do of body, the same harmony of feeling as we do of posture, and quench all sense of provocation under injury, all bitterness of discomfort under affliction, in the prayer of faith; and instead of walking "in the light of our own fire," and "the sparks that we have kindled," shall "trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon our God."

WEDNESDAY BEFORE EASTER.

THE EPISTLE. *Heb. ix.*, 16 to 28.

16 Where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.

17 For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.

18 Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood.

19 For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people,

20 Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.

21 Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.

22 And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

23 It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

25 Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest

entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; . . .
 26 For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: . . .
 28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that shall believe in him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

Here we see the holy Jesus figured to us under the image of a man making a will or testament, which does not take effect until "after men are dead." The will or testament "is of no strength at all while the testator liveth," because it may be altered; but immediately upon the death of the testator, and in truth in consequence of it, the inheritance bequeathed falls into the hands of the heir, and he takes possession of it.

So was it in the case of that will or testament, under which the Son of God left to the heirs of salvation "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." The death of the Son of God gave this testament validity, and completely ratified it. Then was salvation assured to the believer, and no power on earth could take it from him. Death was also necessary under the old or first testament, as a ratification, because "without shedding of blood there could be no remission." And if we look upon a testament or will as a species of covenant, which it certainly is, the figure still holds good. The old covenant between God and man was ratified by blood; and almost on all occasions, with scarcely any exception, was legal defilement thus done away¹. Hence it was not at all extraordinary that the second, new, or, as it may be called, final covenant between God and man, should be ratified by blood also. But this ratification was once for all; and whether we regard the salvation of mankind as an inheritance bequeathed by the will or testament of the Son of God, which became of force after he was dead; or the subject matter of a covenant between an offended God and an offending creature, wherein Jesus became the mediator, in virtue of the effusion of his blood; in either case it is equally true, that Christ was but "once offered to bear the sins of many."

However viewed, then, the death of Christ is the source of unsearchable riches to the Christian, and makes over to him innumerable gifts, comforts, and privileges, if he will only accept them. This acceptance, on the part of the Christian, is,

¹ Levit. xvii, 11.

of course, a main feature in the covenant of Christianity, and essential to the completion of the covenant. If the heir will not accept the inheritance at all, or not accept it upon the conditions offered, he loses the inheritance. So the Christian, if he will not accept the inheritance of salvation upon the terms offered, or not upon any terms at all, forfeits it altogether, and resigns it to those who will fulfil the conditions.

Now, "while it is called to-day"—now, while "it is the accepted time"—must every person in this household, in this place, yea in the whole world, make up his mind what to do, and reconsider the subject of his soul's salvation, if forgotten. There has been much time lost already, either in irresolution, or in deliberate backsliding. That gift of God, eternal life, has not been received with the faith, the gladness, or the free, full, unbounded thankfulness, which its unspeakable importance demands. Worldly rights, temporal privileges, selfish gratifications, present advantages, seem all in all, and leave no room for heavenly affections to enter. How long will this be going on, and where will it end? To-day the Christian man and Christian family are reminded, that a precious legacy has been left to the world. And they will soon be called to commemorate the death of the testator. "Laying aside," then, as with one consent, "all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings¹," let us begin to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints²;" let us thankfully lay claim to the inheritance bequeathed to us; let us strive to surpass one another in faith, in love, in long-suffering, in lowliness, the conditions on which we obtain the inheritance, and then at the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, presently about to be celebrated, let us confirm and ratify our adhesion to Christ, eating and drinking with faith, eating and drinking with thanksgiving.

¹ 1 Pet. ii., 1.

² Jude 3.

THURSDAY BEFORE EASTER.

THE EPISTLE. 1 Cor. xi., 17 to 34.

17 In this that I declare unto you, I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse.

18 For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it.

19 For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

20 When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper.

21 For in eating every one taketh before *other* his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.

22 What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.

23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread:

24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had sup-

ped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come.

27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation, to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

33 Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another.

34 And if any man hunger, let him eat at home, that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.

It appears to have been the Apostle's aim, in this season of his inspiration, to leave on record as complete an exposition as possible, of the nature, use, and origin of the Lord's Supper. And it should be to us a strong token of the perpetual obligation and prominent character of this holy rite, that its institution should be communicated to the Apostle by a special revelation.

The Apostle's exposition of the institution of the Lord's Supper was, in all probability, selected by the compilers of our

Liturgy for the day before Good Friday, on this account, that it not only makes mention of the time and manner of the institution, but also of abuses that had crept into the ordinance, and of exercises that ought to take place before it. Not only are we told, that "the same night in which the Lord Jesus was betrayed, he took bread, and brake it, and gave to his disciples;" and "took the cup, when he had supped, and gave it to them also;" but that the Corinthians, to whom the Epistle is addressed, had come together for the celebration of this Holy Communion, "not for the better, but for the worse," and that for the future they must "examine themselves," before they presume to "eat of that bread and drink of that cup." We are told that they had profanely turned this Holy Communion into a common carnal entertainment, by their irreverent manner of celebrating it; and that by these means, they had eaten and drunk, instead of the Lord's spiritual body and blood, judgment to themselves; and were becoming weak and sickly, and had been visited with great mortality.

What instruction, then, shall we on this occasion gather from the Epistle of the day, not only, it is to be hoped, historical instruction, instruction as to the time, place, and manner of instituting the Lord's Supper, (although that is very valuable,) but instruction in spiritual things, instruction that may "pierce, even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and discern the thoughts and intents of the heart?"

We may infer that this commandment to "show the Lord's death till he come," is a commandment universally binding; that to eat and drink unworthily is in all ages of the Church a sin; and that to examine the heart before every celebration of the Lord's Supper, always has been, and ever will be, a duty. Now there cannot be one amongst us, however worldly, however "dead in trespasses and sins," who does not hope to participate, some time or other, in the benefits of Christ's death: but there may, notwithstanding, be a very great difference, even amongst the few who compose this small congregation, with regard to the commemoration of his death. But why should this be? And how can it be so, consistently with reason? Must not communication at the table of the Lord be a sign, at least, if it be nothing else, of hope in the benefits of his death? And if there be no communication, can there be any hope? And if there be no communication and no hope, can there be any real ground of confidence in the atonement, any actual prospect of

participation in the benefits of the atonement? What then does the hope of him who gives not this outward sign amount to? To nothing that can properly bear the name of hope; to nothing but an expectation, vague and unmeaning in the extreme, of unconditional salvation. If any of us are in this state, there is great need of amendment, of self-examination, of self-condemnation. And unless we judge ourselves, examine ourselves, humble ourselves, we shall certainly be condemned with the world, and lose all interest in Christ. Perhaps even a temporal judgment may bring us to the borders of the grave, and what will become of us if we die unforgiven? And must there not also be danger in "eating and drinking unworthily"? Nearly, if not quite as much, it may be inferred, as in not eating and drinking at all. Prayer is presently about to be made. May it be offered in sincerity and truth, and may its answer be, on this, the evening of the institution of the Lord's Supper¹, the gift, through the Holy Spirit, of "true repentance of former sins, stedfast purposes to lead a new life, lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, thankful remembrance of his death, and charity with all men²."

GOOD FRIDAY.

THE EPISTLE. *Heb. x.*, 1 to 25.

THE law having a shadow of good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

5 Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice

and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:

6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

7 Then said I, Lo, I come, (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.

8 Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offering and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law;

9 Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

¹ Matt. xxvi., 17 to the end.

² Church Catechism.

11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:

12 But this man, after he had offered, one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God:

13 From thenceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

15 Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before,

16 This is the covenant that I will make with them, after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them:

17 And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

18 Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.

19 Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

21 And having an high priest over the house of God;

22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love, and to good works:

25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much, the more as ye see the day approaching.

On this, the day of the Christian atonement, when Jesus came to do the will of God, and "offer one sacrifice for sin," the Church very wisely appoints for the Epistle a portion of Scripture, which describes the insufficiency of the Levitical sacrifice. The Levitical sacrifice showed the necessity of sacrifice, as well as the inability of that hitherto prescribed to make permanent atonement. It grounded upon the inherent frailty of him who sacrificed, the perpetual necessity of sacrifice, and significantly typified, in its own emblems and shadows, the substance of good things to come.

All this is plainly set forth in the Epistle for the day. It is most satisfactorily laid down and proved, that "the blood of bulls and of goats, could not take away sins;" that "the law could not make the comers to the sacrifices perfect;" that "in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin God could have no pleasure." And hence it is most naturally inferred, that he who was an High Priest, most confessedly "without infirmity;" he who needed not to offer oftentimes the same sacrifices; but only one sacrifice; he who came to do the will of God, and really did it, was the only sin offering that could effectually "perfect for ever them that are sanctified." His divinity as God, his purity and

innocence as man, were quite sufficient to make the only perfect atonement for sin that was ever offered. His purity and innocence were never denied, his divinity has been most incontestably proved, and hence we have in him, and in him alone, a covenanted access to the Father, and a propitiation that must ever prevail.

Who is he that can harm us, be he angel or spirit, fellow-creature or our own selves, if the Lord be really on our side, and we on his? Our own little flock, in particular, will be ever thus protected; collectively and individually, if we put our trust in him, and are both in love to God, and love within ourselves, a pattern of believers. Only let the death of Christ be the corner-stone of the faith of each of us, the sole refuge in affliction of each of us, the atonement, without which we should each of us feel unreconciled, and still liable to receive the dreadful wages of sin; and then we shall have help from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of our salvation. We shall not be without defence. We shall never really fall. And if this be really the case with respect to each or any of us, the fruits, to which the Apostle exhorts, will be sure to follow, and in particular, there will be "boldness to enter into the holiest by the new and living way," the blood of Jesus, which no other principle can give.

It would be a most profitable exercise to inquire, on each return of this day, how far the death of Christ does constrain us to draw near in worship, in service, in imitation, to God; how far our faith is a full or an imperfect faith; to what extent an evil conscience has been made to feel the influence of the cleansing powers of grace, or the corrupting examples of the world. And it would also be a profitable exercise to note, whether our faith is the strong, stable, bold faith it ought to be; whether it is a faith ever moved from its steadfastness by a sneer, a subtle argument, a heavy trial; and whether, if it is ever thus shaken, it is the faith it ought to be. And may not the commemoration of the death of Christ be a fitting opportunity for reviewing the relation in which we stand to one another, and the obligations imposed upon us—founded upon the exceeding great love and precious death of Christ—of loving one another. May the blood of the atonement of Christ flow freely through the spiritual body of this Christian family; and give life, through faith, to all the members of it; and then each will "consider the other, to provoke unto love and to good works;" and "the charity of every

one of us all towards each other," springing from so holy a faith, will "abound¹." The commemoration of the death of Christ should also constrain us to look to other parts of our outward and public conduct, more particularly to our attendance at public worship. It is on a day consecrated to him and in his house that the people ransomed by his blood are bidden to assemble themselves together, and through his mighty power to set forward the salvation of their souls. And it is in the same blessed name, and for the same holy end, that we are now assembled at home. May each of us, in our respective vocations, practise and promote, as much as lieth in us, every kind of communion with God that tends to glorify him. In the family, in the congregation, in the world, be it our study and glory to make all men know that we are Christ's disciples, disciples in conduct as well as by profession, disciples by conviction as well as in appearance, remembering that the day of reckoning is approaching, which will decide who are really Christ's and who are really holy, and will publicly prove, to the glory of the redeemed and the shame of the accursed, that "the Lord will be found of those that seek him, but that those who forsake him he will cast off for ever²."

EASTER EVEN.

THE EPISTLE. 1 St. Peter iii., 17 to 22.

17 It is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;

20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of

Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

22 Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

A Saviour dead and buried, a Saviour presently about to rise again from the dead, is presented to our view this day. Buried, according to prophecy, by a rich man³; resting from all the

¹ 2 Thess. i., 3.

² 1 Chron. xxviii., 9.

³ Isai. liii., 9.

indignities which, according to the same prophecy, he had been ordained to suffer¹, the incarnate Son of God had been obedient unto death, and, like any other man, lay motionless in the grave. The grave was his place of bodily sojourn in the interval between his death and his resurrection, and while his soul was with the spirits of the just in paradise, his body slept its short sleep in the rich man's sepulchre.

While the disciples of Jesus are contemplating their master in the grave, their thoughts will naturally revert to his previous sufferings; and they will not inappropriately remind themselves, that "it is better, if the will of God be so, that they, if they suffer, suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing." The great feature in the sufferings of Jesus was, that he suffered for well-doing, that he suffered in the stead of those who had been guilty of evil-doing; and that he suffered patiently. To do likewise is not, though it ought to be, the aim of all his disciples. In all these respects the disciples of Christ fall far short of their master; and they require his example, his spirit, his chastisement, his holy word, to teach them better. Amongst one another at home, and in their intercourse with the world at large, Christian people must, whether in high or in low station, walk by this rule, and mind this thing. Even if they suffer for well-doing they must be patient, and much more if they suffer for evil-doing. And especially if their tempers are unruly and irritable, they must make an effort, and with the help of God's grace, endeavour to bring themselves under the dominion of "a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price²."

The Apostle next takes us back to the times before the flood, wherein he tells us, that the same spirit which quickened Jesus, spake in him to the disobedient and gainsaying people of that day³; and warns us to make the same use of baptism that Noah and his family did of the ark, and through faith and "the answer of a good conscience toward God" make good our claim to all those privileges, which the resurrection, through baptism, sets before us. In effect he tells us to follow with the greater patience the example which Jesus, in his death and passion, proposes to our imitation, from the signal proof given of their atoning power in his resurrection.

And to a Christian family, what does he virtually say? Follow the example of Noah and his family, and be saved in the

¹ *Isai. liiii.*, 4 to 8.

² *1 Pet. iii.*, 4.

³ Compare *Gen. vi.*, 3, 5, 13, with *Heb. xi.*, 7.

manner that God has appointed. Take warning by the example of the sinners of the old world, and delay not, until it is too late, to seek salvation¹. Take heed to the promises made in your baptism. Work them out, refer to them, fulfil them. Remember the promises made to you by Jesus. Desire them, value them, realize them. The Saviour buried reminds you of your mortality, your natural corruption, your need of an atonement. The risen Saviour beckons you to follow him. He bids you "die unto sin and live unto righteousness²;" and in your intercourse with one another, to "be of one mind;" to "live in peace;" and that if such be your habit and your resolve, "the God of love and peace shall be with you³." But what say you to this proposal? Do you make the pious resolve, or do you decline it? Is death unto sin your habit? Is life unto righteousness your desire? Has patience in you its perfect work? Has humility a place? Has repentance begun? These are questions of moment, and they require an answer. And what is the answer? Do you neither at present "put away the filth of the flesh," nor intend so to do in time to come? Is there no sign of repentance begun, humility increasing, patience made perfect? Is all your religion profession, all your supplication formality? What do you say to these things? Let there be a remedy, yes, and an instant remedy, if at present sin has dominion. "The blood of Christ which cleanseth from all sin⁴," and procureth all grace, can still save you; and be that blood your stay. "Repent that your sins be blotted out⁵." Believe that you may have a Saviour. Pray that he may forgive your sins. And then, that grace of baptism which you had for a while lost, will return again; that answer of a good conscience which was solemnly promised, will be literally fulfilled; and that steadfast endurance of evil and all other resistance to temptation, which was implied in the self-renunciations of baptism, will be for ever ratified and confirmed. And such, if you have been grievous sinners, and self-examination does its work, will be the issue. To those who either will not examine themselves, or after a cursory self-examination still continue in sin, little can be said, but that they are "in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity," and so will remain for ever unless they truly repent. But to those who truly repent, and to those who have been in the main faithful, the fulfilment

¹ Gen. vii., 21 to 23.

² Baptismal Service.

³ 2 Cor. xiii., 11.

⁴ 1 John i., 7.

⁵ Acts iii., 19.

⁶ Acts viii., 23.

of the promise abideth, sure: "where I am there shall also my servant be¹."

MASTER DAY.

THE EPISTLE. Col. iii, 1 to 7.

1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.

7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.

There is a fund of instruction in this brief exhortation of the Apostle, and, adapted as it is so well to the present season, it may be made applicable to its spiritual purposes with the greatest advantage. The spiritual deliverance celebrated this day, was the redemption of a whole world from sin, and the power of the grave; and the agency by which it was brought about was the agency of Jesus Christ's resurrection.

Man was under the bondage of sin. His flesh could do no good thing by reason of that severe taskmaster, a deceitful heart. "He had a king over him, which was the angel of the bottomless pit;" "the spirit which now worketh in the children of disobedience." At length came deliverance from this grievous thralldom. Sin was not allowed to have complete dominion over us. The faculties were set free. The passions were enabled to escape from bondage, and a way was opened for the soul to fly.

And man was under the bondage of affliction. He was "born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." He was overtaken with it at every turn. He suffered from it in every shape. He "looked for some to have pity on him, but there was no man; neither found he any to comfort him." At last came deliverance from the power of this enemy. Affliction lost its ability to afflict, and an influence sprung up, which could "wipe away tears from off all faces."

And again, man was under the bondage of death. That inexorable tyrant was sweeping one generation after another

¹ John xii, 26.

² Rev. ix, 11.

³ Eph. ii, 2.

⁴ Job v, 7.

⁵ Ps. lxxix, 20.

⁶ Isai. xxv, 8.

into the grave, and none knew how to escape, delay, or withstand his coming. But a time came at last, when the bitterness of this bondage was made to cease, and a reasonable prospect held out of its being eventually swallowed up altogether in victory. And all this was brought about by the agency of Jesus Christ's resurrection. His resurrection proved him to be omnipotent, as his life had before proved him to be sinless, and his death infinite in love. His resurrection proved him to be the Son of God, as his incarnation had declared him to be the Son of Man. His resurrection proved him to be a sacrifice well pleasing to God, an infallible publisher and unerring bringer to pass of prophecy, a most sufficient Saviour, and a most truly royal Prince of peace.

And above all, his resurrection has established ours, and afforded assurance unto all men of a day of general judgment, when all men shall rise again with their bodies. But although "Christ who is our life, shall then appear;" and we also, it is to be hoped, shall "appear with him in glory," still do sin, sorrow, and death, and those evil things for the sake of which the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience, in a certain abridged sense, remain until the day of general judgment.

Then shall there be great destruction, and a most complete victory over all enemies. He whom in the days of his flesh "man despised and the nation abhorred¹," shall come forth "clothed with a cloud, a rainbow on his head, his face as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire²." He who stood before the governor in a human form, shall be seen "sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven³." He who appeared before an earthly tribunal as a malefactor, shall be seen erecting his own tribunal, and arraigning a whole world. "All things shall be subdued unto him;" "all things shall be put under him⁴." Death, the last enemy, shall himself experience the destruction he had been so long inflicting. Time, and chance, and every thing transient, and perishing, and contributing to evil, shall be brought to nought. Sin and sorrow shall disappear amid the ruins of their place of sojourn; evil shall cease; imperfection shall be done away; "the wicked shall be turned into hell⁵;" and the author of evil into the torment that he made for others.

This doctrine may well teach the members of a Christian

¹ Isai. xlix., 7.

² Rev. x., 1.

³ Matt xxiv., 30.

⁴ 1 Cor. xv., 27, 28.

⁵ Ps. ix., 17.

family to "seek those things which are above," to "set their affection on things above," to "mortify their members which are upon the earth." And why? Because, says the Apostle, this preference of things above, this mortification of things on the earth, is the only true sign of the soul's resurrection from sin. Unless the affections are thus raised heavenward, and detached from all things earthly, we are not spiritually risen, and unless we are spiritually risen we shall not rise with Christ to heaven, or appear with him in glory hereafter. A risen Saviour requires a risen disciple. A Saviour gone into heaven requires his people in spirit to follow him, that where he is, there they may be also.

Be it our care then, such being the unalterable condition of man's participation in the resurrection, to become spiritually conformed to Christ, and to walk in newness of life. But do we show these signs of true spiritual vitality? In our original nature we are children of wrath and servants of sin. Has this inbred corruption undergone a change? Are we awakened from our sleep—uplifted from our prostrate condition—raised from our death of sin to a life of righteousness? Do all our thoughts, feelings, affections, occupations, now take the upward course of a risen Saviour, and with him continually dwell? Is it the chief study, the evident object of our existence to devote ourselves, soul and body, to heavenly things? Can any one with justice say of us, that we are not thus pre-occupied, but that we mind earthly things, serve carnal lusts, follow our own wayward wills, and yield implicit submission to all those worldly vanities, to which we are often affirming, with our own mouths, the vengeance of God to be due? Or what is far worse, can God, who "looketh on the heart and seeth not as man seeth¹," note any of these evil affections abiding in us? Can he, although the world cannot, see in us "a heart exercised with covetous practices," a heart unrenewed, "dead in trespasses and sins," "in bondage under the elements of the world?"

Let us inquire seriously into all these things, and "the Lord give us understanding in all things²." May he "purge out the old leaven" if it be still in us. May he quicken anew the spiritual principle if it be in any wise dormant. And so let us "keep this feast, not with the old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth³." And let us ever remember, in particular, that upon this spiritual resurrection with Christ, will our appear-

¹ 1 Sam. xvi., 7.² 2 Tim. ii., 7.³ 1 Cor. v., 7.

ance with him hereafter in glory in a great measure depend. And what is the glory in which we must all desire to appear? Surely that which the death and resurrection of Christ, to-day celebrated, has purchased for the faithful. And can any comparison, however forcible, illustrate it? The rest of the most peaceful Sabbath passes away. The bliss of the most permanent earthly enjoyment comes to a close. The grasp of the most gigantic human intellect knows a limit. The intensity of the most ardent natural love waxes cold. The strength of the most vigorous old age waxes feeble. But the rest, the joy, the knowledge, the love, the life of the Paradise above, are unsatiated and unsatiable. "The tree of life," transplanted from the earthly to the spiritual Paradise, "yields her fruit every month¹." Watered and tended by the Lord of life, and for ever nurtured with the light of his countenance, she "stretches forth her branches unto the sea, and her boughs unto the river," and the glorified partakers of her bountifulness know no end thereof.

MONDAY IN EASTER WEEK.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Acts x., 34 to 43.*

34 Peter opened *his* mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

36 The word which *God* sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

37 That word, *I say*, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;

41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, *even* to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God *to be* the Judge of quick and dead.

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

It is not deemed sufficient by our Church to appoint a full service for the anniversary of the resurrection without at the

¹ Rev. xxii., 2.

same time ordaining some further honour to be done to a risen Saviour on the two days that follow.

The portion of Scripture selected on this occasion is well calculated to answer the end in view, inasmuch as it is an exposition of the doctrine of the resurrection, through the medium of Peter's address to Cornelius. Cornelius was the first Gentile convert, and it was very natural, that to him and his company it should be deemed expedient to address a very full "declaration of the things most surely believed" among the Jewish disciples. What a comfortable assurance does this address contain, that in the call of the Gentile Cornelius, God is ascertained, beyond a doubt, to be no respecter of persons, and to "accept in every nation them that fear him and work righteousness."

After recapitulating the facts and doctrines connected with the history of Jesus already widely circulated, and of which he asserts that he and his brother Apostles were witnesses, the Apostle at length comes to the main point in his address, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This he establishes on the ocular testimony of the chosen friends and familiar companions of Jesus, even of those "who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead;" and thence he deduces the doctrine of a general resurrection and judgment, a belief in which unto salvation the prophets have testified to be the only condition, on which, through the name of Jesus, remission of sins can be granted¹.

The Church having provided this service, with the view of keeping up, in the souls of her children, the devotional feelings of the Sabbath service, imposes upon them very appropriately the obligation of bearing it in mind through the week. The disciples of Jesus cannot well complain of being called together in public or private too often, on too many days, or in too many places, to celebrate with due solemnity so great an event as the completion of their redemption; and accordingly on a day appointed for public worship, do we, duly sensible of its necessity, meet together in private, anxious, it is to be hoped, to hear all information connected with the soul's peace, ready to receive the risen Saviour as a Saviour now and a Judge hereafter, hopeful of a remission of sins through the name that alone justifies, and thankful for that comprehensive mercy which accords acceptance to "all men every where" who "fear God and work righteousness."

¹ Jerem. xxxi., 34. Micah vii., 18, 19.

It is certain, then, that there will be a general resurrection, a day of general judgment, a sentence to be passed on all men. It is certain that he who "overcame the sharpness of death" will at the appointed time come authoritatively forth to be our Judge. And how shall a man prepare for that day, for that sentence, for that Judge? The mode of preparation is appointed, made known, and within our reach. This day we can prepare by beginning to believe, by continuing to believe, by believing in deed and in truth, by more and more believing than before. Is this easy? No, in no wise, if we are to judge of it by the effects produced, the numbers that believe, and their endeavours to win eternal life. Few there are that bring forth those fruits of belief which beget a fear of God and a work of righteousness, and to none but these can be granted remission of sins; to none but these can the resurrection speak peace and comfort. The difficulty, then, of truly believing in a risen Saviour being so great, and upon the intrinsic character of that belief so mainly depending remission of sins and acceptance by the Judge of all men, the necessity of turning the thoughts to the subject at once becomes apparent. Let this be done at once; let remission of sins be the great object at which we aim; let the condition on which it is offered be complied with; and the Lord cannot fail to perform his promise.

And while the subject is yet uppermost in our thoughts, may the Spirit of God, without whom nothing difficult can be begun, continued, or ended, give it a right direction in each of us. May he awake in each of us the spell-bound spirit from the slumber of sin, and rouse it to a heavenward flight. May he bow the heart of all this little flock even as the heart of one man, so that there may be in it a unity of spirit, a bond of peace, and an agreement, as far as it is possible, both in faith and practice. And according as he may deem it expedient in each case, may he from this day forward "warn those amongst us who are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak," and infuse patience into all. And if such be his work, and it be to any extent successful, there will be indeed "remission of sins."

TUESDAY IN EASTER WEEK.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Acts xiii., 26 to 41.*

26 Men *and* brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.

27 For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled *them* in condemning *him*.

28 And though they found no cause of death *in him*, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.

29 And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took *him* down from the tree, and laid *him* in a sepulchre.

30 But God raised him from the dead :

31 And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.

32 And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,

33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again ; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

34 And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, *now* no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.

35 Wherefore he saith also in another *psalm*, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

36 For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption :

37 But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.

38 ¶ Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins :

39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

40 Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets :

41 Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish : for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

In this "word of exhortation for the people" St. Paul addresses himself to the Jews¹, and shows them that the prophecies had been accomplished in that Messiah, whom "they that dwelt at Jerusalem and their rulers" had condemned. He points out, further, that although their wickedness, in desiring that their Messiah should be slain, had been very great, they had been excused on account of their ignorance. And he declares unto the Jews there assembled, the glad tidings, that through Jesus raised up from the dead, according to "the promise made unto the fathers," all that believed would "be justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses."

¹ See verses 14, 15, and 16.

And he adds to the exhortation by way of application, that the prophets had pronounced a woe, by anticipation, upon the despisers of the Messiah's atonement. "Behold, says he, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you¹."

The Church, wisely judging that the truths here set forth might be edifying to her people at this season, has seen fit to order that some of them should be rehearsed this day. It behoves us, who are assembled this evening for worship, to take in good part her purpose, and profit by it. We of this household are, like the Jews, rich in spiritual privileges. We are indeed, together with our brethren, "a chosen generation." Justified freely by the grace of God, "justified from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses," we, whosoever we are in this family that forsake and renounce our sins, may well rejoice with trembling for all the gifts bestowed upon us, all the blessings poured down upon us. Constant watchfulness is necessary, lest assurance creep in and puff us up; lest worldliness, lest wilfulness, lest any other sin of unfaithfulness, deprive us of Christ's justifying righteousness, and put us again at enmity with God.

Some of us, not improbably, may as yet be without the faith necessary to justification. If such we be, let us beware lest that come upon us which is spoken of in the prophets. Without faith there cannot be justification. Without justification there cannot be admission to heaven. And if admission to heaven be the object at which we all, at least professedly, aim, faith must find a place in the heart; not a mere mechanical assent to certain truths—not a mere impression of the understanding—not a mere act of the imagination—not a mere effort of the memory—but a lively, practical principle—seated in the heart and evidenced in the conduct; comprehending within its wide range all good things done for man, past, present, and to come, with a stedfast gratitude and implicit trust; and looking, with a clear and unclouded eye, through the mists and glooms of present imperfection, to "a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens²." Without such faith as this it is impossible to please God; and yet it may be attained by the humblest member of any household, if he seeks for it in an available manner. And forgiveness of sins follows it; justi-

¹ Isai. xxix., 14; Hab. i., 5.

² 2 Cor. v., 1.

fication in full belongs to it; peace with God through Christ is its sure reward.

But, as the Apostle says, "Beware." Beware of taking things easily; beware of trifling with God; beware of indecision; beware of delay. The Lord will "work a work" in the day of judgment, as he did in the day of the Son of man, "which, if we shall in no wise now believe, though a man declare it unto us," we shall "behold, and wonder, and perish," when we see it with our own eyes, and "are in hell, even in torments¹." But this must not be. We must not thus pass our own sentence, prepare our own doom, become our own accusers. We must rather profit by our day of grace, give diligence in our hour of trial, and "save ourselves from this untoward generation²." We must be sure that we have faith, and endeavour to ascertain it. We must not take for granted that we believe, and make no effort to find evidence of our belief. We must not be unstable, unsettled, irresolute, sometimes seeking after God, sometimes turning aside after Satan, for a while servants of Christ, for a while lovers of the world.

Above all we must not postpone to sickness, old age, or a death-bed, what should be done now, and if not done now, may never be done at all. Is the Lord in any wise glorified by a constrained conformity to his will, a compulsory resort to supplication, or a slavish fear of his vengeance, emotions which may perchance vanish into thin air the moment we are delivered from the peril of death, and which have only had place in our hearts at all, because we thought we were about to die? And is not the soul in a much greater degree edified, proved, sanctified, purified by a diligent use of the means of grace in the day of grace, and by a hearty and willing devotion of all the best energies, both of body and soul, to the work given it to do, than by this sort of service? Yes, it is indeed reasonable that the Lord should have the best of our powers, and have them in their prime. It is indeed reasonable, that he should be more abundantly glorified by a free-will offering than by a forced compliance, by a service of love than by a worship of fear. "Oh that there were such an heart in us, that we would," even now, "fear the Lord and keep all his commandments always, that it might be well with us and with our children for ever³!" Oh that we were now true believers, obeying the will of God from the heart, worshipping him in spirit and in truth,

¹ Luke xvi., 23.

² Acts ii., 40.

³ Deut. v., 29.

adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things! Oh that we would now, in our days of health and strength, draw nigh unto God, and not reserve our repentance for a death-bed! Oh that we would now, while the glad tidings of a risen Saviour are yet sounding in our ears, accept gratefully the offer of forgiveness of sin, and confess and believe henceforth unto salvation!

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE EPISTLE. 1 *St. John* v., 4 to 12.

4 Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith.

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

6 This is he that came by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ: not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

7 For there are three that bare record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the

water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

10 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12 He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

A most important truth is here proclaimed, even the omnipotence of grace. "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." Victory must always ensue where God takes up a cause; and hence whatever appearances there may be in any man of in-dwelling grace, they cannot be real, if they have not led to this issue. And thus victory over the world may be called the test of God's presence in the soul; the token of his having imparted to it the inward as well as outward baptism; the pledge of his still "working in it both to will and to do of his good pleasure¹."

The Apostle makes known to us, further, that the particular principle through which the Holy Ghost enables the soul to gain such mighty victories over the world, is faith; faith in Jesus as the Son of God, faith in Jesus as the Word who hath both "given and received witness from the beginning." And then

¹ Philip. ii., 13.

he most naturally leads our thoughts to the Trinity, that mysterious Triune Godhead, in which the Son and Holy Ghost, of whose offices he had just been speaking, are, with the Father, most incomprehensibly united, and in no respect more remarkably so than in their testimony to the truth of the Gospel. It appears, in fact, that the earthly as well as heavenly, the inward as well as outward testimony borne to the mission of Jesus, is very great, in truth so great that none can reasonably resist it and have life; none in very deed receive it and be without life.

There being three, then, that attest this truth in heaven, "the Father¹, the Word², and the Holy Ghost³," and three that bear testimony to the same effect in earth, the Spirit in his operation on the soul, the water in the outward operation of baptism, and the blood of Christ visibly represented in the sacramental wine, as well as the soul's inward confirmation of all the testimonies, there must be infinite peace in believing, unspeakable peril in not believing, what has been so incontrovertibly proved. On the one hand, this Scripture places before us a faith that "overcomes the world;" a faith that "has the witness in itself;" a faith that "has the Son, and therefore has life." And, on the other hand, it places before us an unbelief that "makes God a liar," and "has not the Son, and therefore has not life." If there were one argument that could more powerfully than another encourage the believer and awaken the unbeliever, it would be this representation of the consequences, respectively, of belief and unbelief. While the memorial of the well-attested fact of Jesus Christ's divinity and resurrection is yet sounding in our ears, of that Jesus Christ's divinity and resurrection who "came not by water only but by water and blood," there should also be a memorial of it taking deeper and deeper root in our hearts. He who "came by water and blood" is able and willing, not only to "sprinkle our hearts from an evil conscience," but also to make atonement for every forsaken sin. Be the sin of unbelief, then, the sin to which the attention of every individual amongst us be especially paid, because it is at the root of every evil thing. "God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son," and in his Son alone. It is most dangerous to disconnect the hope of eternal life from the only mode of attaining it, Jesus Christ, because if lively faith in him is an earnest of eternal life, so the lack, the weakness, or the

¹ Matt. iii., 17, and xvii., 5. ² John i., 18, and v., 36.

³ Matt. iii., 16. Acts ii., 1 to 4.

nominal appearance of it, must be, according to this Scripture, neither the prospect nor possession of life.

Persons who have been brought up in what are called Christian principles from their youth, are too apt to be unsuspicious upon this subject. It does not occur to them that their faith may be defective, or that upon the character of their faith must necessarily depend, not only all their present principles, but all their future hopes. Be this, then, very much more than heretofore, the care of all, however regular the homage of the outward worship, however punctual the discharge of the private obligation, however amiable the personal character, however happy the domestic life; because, most certainly, upon the concurrent evidence of the best testimony that heaven and earth can give, a faith that works by love in every department of life and in every corner of the heart, can be the only saving faith, the only true ground of confidence; and he that has the Son in this sense has life, and he that has not the Son in this sense has not life.

We often "receive the witness of men" in worldly matters. We do not disbelieve it. We implicitly credit it. Although we have not seen the things of which evidence is given with our own eyes, we are as ready to account them true as though we had been eye-witnesses. Shall man be trusted, and not God? Shall the weak, frail, perishing creature of earth be deemed more worthy of credit than his unchangeable omnipotent Creator? Oh, let not such a thought flit, even momentarily, across our mind, but rather let "God" be held "true and every man a liar¹," rather let God be held the most worthy of trust, and man the least. We would have life, eternal life. Have we sought it through God's only and blessed Son; through faith in him; through faith working by love, overcoming the world, having the witness in itself, born verily of God? This is the only method, the only plan, the only course, by which, through Christ, we can attain it. The great, the chief sign of success, or of an approach to success, is, beyond a doubt, victory over the world; and then—we shall be more than conquerors.

¹ Rom. iii., 4.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

1 *St. Peter* ii., 19 to 25.

19 This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

20 For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently! but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously:

24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

25 For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

Grief, in some form or other, is the sure inheritance of every son of Adam; and the only difference between one man and another in this respect is, that one man suffers justly and another wrongfully; one man endures grief and another cannot; one man has more grief falling to his lot and another less. The Christian, upon principle, has much to think of in the matter, because he is professedly holy, chosen, and peculiar; and, as such, has means of enduring grief, and enduring it in a good cause, which other men cannot have. He can look to his Saviour, and so, "for conscience toward God, endure grief, suffering wrongfully." He can look to his Saviour, and so, because it is "acceptable with God," "do well and suffer for it" and "take it patiently." He can look to his Saviour, as the great example to guide, the great atonement to make satisfaction, and an example specially exemplifying, and an atonement making perfect satisfaction, through suffering. And this suffering, wholly undeserved and borne most patiently, may teach him to bear his much lighter suffering, deserved and undeserved, in like manner.

By far the greater part of man's suffering is deserved, although very often, in the pride of his heart, he holds it to be undeserved. If he is buffeted or visited with chastisement for his faults, he "receives the due reward of his deeds¹," and therefore, although the chastisement may not for the present "seem joyous but grievous²," he must submit to it with a good grace as deserved. And if he really and in good truth "does well and suffers for

¹ Luke xxiii., 41.

² Heb. xii., 11.

it," his actions or motives being misinterpreted, a patient endurance of the trouble will be acceptable with God, although it cannot in itself be merit, but only the fulfilment of a duty.

Every member of a family is occasionally in this situation. He is either corrected for a fault or without cause. If a child is corrected, whether with or without a reason, he must take it patiently, looking unto Christ as an example of patience and a rewarder of well-doing. If any other member of a family is rebuked, either justly or wrongfully, he must take the same course, and bear the rebuke with patience. And there must be similar patience shown in the endurance of the provocation we meet with in the world. Whatever may arise in a man's intercourse with his fellow-Christians in general to trouble him, he must, in the spirit of his patient Master, take meekly and contentedly; always keeping his eye fixed upon that perfect man of God, Christ Jesus, "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."

And it will be the more incumbent upon him to strive, God's grace striving with him, to do this, in every position in which he may be placed, from the known inability of man, particularly of the natural man, to keep those unruly evils, the tongue and the temper, in order. These are among the last of the soul's enemies that a person truly converted to God brings completely into subjection; but in Christ our example, there was never any token of their presence. He bore every thing that he had to bear (and it was very great, and very grievous, and altogether inconceivable) with a patience that cannot be described, or even imagined. And so must perfection, in this particular matter of endurance, be the aim of all, though it can never be the complete attainment of any. And, be it remembered, none can be deemed "holy and beloved," or be addressed as "the elect of God," unless they have to a certain degree gained the mastery, from "conscience toward God," over every remnant of sin, and driven it from its stronghold for ever.

We have every motive for acting on the principle of "conscience toward God," and of "faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." The hope of eternal life and the only means of attaining it are in and through Jesus Christ, and he has put us in complete possession both of the one and the other by his death; a death which has healed our stripes, carried our sins and sorrows, and brought back sheep that had gone astray to the fold

of the great Shepherd. In Jesus Christ, then, the Shepherd of souls, the sufferer for the sins of others, himself being without sin and without guile, must implicit faith be placed. And if it be a faith, holy, unprovable, and, above all, implanted in the soul by the Holy Spirit, it will enable the believer to "endure grief, suffering wrongfully," and to abstain from wounding the feelings of others. It will enable him to die unto sin and live unto righteousness, to follow the steps of him who has gone before him to heaven, and to return unto that sure refuge from whence he had so long strayed, to depart from its shelter no more for ever.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE EPISTLE. 1 *St. Peter* ii., 11 to 17.

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech *you* as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul:

12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by *your* good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;

14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.

15 For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

16 As free, and not using *your* liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

17 Honour all *men*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

The duration of the longest life is, comparatively speaking, so very short, and the business of the present life, whether long or short, does so necessarily and manifestly point toward that which is to come, that the Apostle cannot employ language better adapted to his purpose, or more naturally forcible in itself, than that which he here uses. The world, in whatsoever light viewed, is not a home; nor is life, under any circumstances, a walk in a place that abideth for ever. Considerations founded on futurity should actuate the present conduct; motives derived from eternity should regulate the unstable affections. Interest no less than duty should constrain the disciple of Christ to forego what must "perish with the using¹," and incline him in all his worldly ways to acknowledge one who is greater than the world.

¹ Col. ii., 22.

Even if a man is foolish enough to take the world in exchange for his soul, he cannot retain the evil treasure long. Even if worldly prosperity or honour possess the charms ascribed to them, they cannot do more for a man than accompany him to the confines of the grave, and there leave him. From this view of the transitory character of the present scene faith may take courage, and fight the good fight in earnest. "The fleshly lust which wars against the soul," cannot war against it long. "The ignorance of foolish men," which speaks a word against an honest conversation, may easily, with well-doing, be "put to silence." The time which is short for a work of ungodliness, is short for a trial of faith. And thus the difficulties of a stedfast faith, as well as the pleasures of a besetting sin, are but for a season. Can he whom professedly we serve urge upon us a more conclusive, a more awakening, a more intelligible argument than this? Met together as we are this evening; holding intercourse together as we do daily; do we notwithstanding remember that here "we have no continuing city¹," and that those only have permanent communion that inherit eternal life, and inhabit the "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God?"

In a word, are we not all, as the Apostle speaks, "strangers and pilgrims," at present far from home, in prospect travelling towards home, and so under every obligation not so altogether to set our affections on the pleasures of a strange land, as to forget the paramount claims, ties, and attractions of our real home. Be it the immediate business of him who is far from God, to give attention to this doctrine. His present situation is one of complete alienation from the life of God; of darkness that may be felt; of total blindness to his ultimate destiny; of wilful ignorance of what really concerns him. At present he has no home in a spiritual sense; no place of peace where a reconciled Father will meet him; no house of refuge, where love will cherish and save him. Separated at present from Jesus, and so without any true home of permanence, he is in things pertaining to God an alien, and cannot, under existing circumstances, see life until he is put into the new and living way that leads to it. He must repent of his sins, stop short in his wanderings, and, though hitherto intent upon earthly things, seek only for the future those things which are above.

To him who is a true disciple of the crucified Saviour, little

¹ Heb. xiii., 14.

² Heb. xi., 10.

need be said except in the way of encouragement. Like the believing fathers under the old dispensation, he will, in the fulness of his faith, regard not the crooked places and rough ways of his earthly pilgrimage, but expect them to be crooked and rough. Like the believing fathers, he will fight the good fight of faith with the sword of the Spirit; manfully overcome difficulties with the hope that abides in him; in all his seasons of communing with the world have prime respect unto the recompense of Heaven, and place the chief trust, even in worldly prosperity, in him through whom he has been enabled to prosper.

There is another edifying truth which this passage of Scripture brings home to us; and it is this—that for the Lord's sake the true believer will bring every outward action of his life, and every species of intercourse with the world, into complete spiritual regulation. The faith of a Christian, if it be real, is not an empty theory or enthusiastic reverie, fit only for those that study and philosophize—but a high and holy faculty of the soul, most meet for the consideration of all, supplying the wants of all, and entering into the actions, energies, and relations of all, however various and complex. If a servant of God follows out the teaching of this practical faith in all that it sets before him, he will never cause “the way of truth to be evil spoken of,” or “give any occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.” He will simply act as a Christian in every department of outward duty, and instead of suffering his piety to evaporate in prayers, studies, or abstractions, will give it free course in his life, and turn it to account in all things. To “submit himself to every ordinance of man;” to use his Gospel liberty in the manner prescribed by the Gospel; to “honour all men,” and especially the Sovereign; to “love the brotherhood;” to “fear God:” these will be among the most triumphant evidences, the most prominent aims of his faith; and taught of the Spirit, led by the Spirit, crucified unto the world, he will so, as servant, master, subject, neighbour, pass through things temporal, that finally, blessed be the holy name and precious blood of Christ, he will be enabled to win the things eternal.

But further, this Scripture shows us, that we live in a watchful world. There is always a readiness to speak against the servant of Christ as an evil-doer. There is always an “ignorance of foolish men,” which needs to be “put to silence by well-doing.”

¹ 2 Pet. ii., 2.

² 2 Sam. xii., 14.

The world, even though it be wicked, is watchful. The things which it does not do itself, it requires to be done by others. What it hates it will seem to preach. What it loves it will vehemently denounce. And why, because with the natural inconsistency of a hardened heart, the innate repugnance to goodness is lost sight of in the desire to denounce the good man. The light of an honest conversation is distasteful, because it brings discredit on that which is evil. Those then, who are, by the grace of God, both professors and doers of good things, must be very careful and vigilant in their conversation, lest they be evil spoken of. They have set themselves on a high place by their pre-eminence in piety, from whence they can readily be watched; and watched, they should never forget, by enemies. The eye of man, inconsistently extreme to mark what is done amiss, is ever upon them. The slightest deviation from the prescribed course, the smallest concession to the vanities of the world, the least frailty, the most trifling inconsistency, is noted in a moment. Be believers, then, on this account most especially, circumspect, careful of their characters, studious of walking not as fools, but as wise, heedful lest they fall, fearful of the appearance of evil, fortified against sudden temptation. Oh let them thus walk and they shall be preserved. Oh let them thus live, and they shall be kept through Christ for ever. Loving him, they shall be loved themselves; glorifying him, they shall be glorified again. And let us now conclude our meditations by turning the several topics they embrace into a prayer, and beseeching the Lord, in words inspired by himself, to give us grace to regard ourselves as so completely "strangers and pilgrims," as from henceforth and for ever to "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul," "to come out from the world and be separate¹," "to submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake," and "to have our conversation so honest among the Gentiles," and among all men, that "ignorance shall be put to silence," and "God glorified in the day of visitation."

¹ 2 Cor. vi., 17.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE EPISTLE. *St. James i., 17 to 21.*

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren,

let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

The worldly-minded man is so wise in his own conceits, so puffed up with his vain philosophy, so proud of being the architect, as he calls it, of his own fortune, that he forgets who "has given him power to get wealth¹," and who can take it away again. And in a like spirit are many other of God's good gifts received by those whose souls are not built up in Christ. The gift of a good understanding is often thus received. The gift of a plentiful harvest is often thus received. The gift of bodily health, the gift of kind friends, yea, above all, the gift of eternal life, is often thus received. The persuasion seems to be, in each of these cases, that a man's endeavours, deservings, abilities, have either altogether, or in a great measure, *won* for him whatever he possesses; but "this persuasion cometh not of him who has called him²;" and is a sign more or less, wherever it exists, of weak faith or much abused grace. That it does exist in some form or other, in almost every heart, is certain; and there cannot be a more edifying use of the present moment than to bring home, in all its force and fulness, to every unbelieving soul amongst us, the undoubted truth, that "every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

In general, too little attention is paid to this truth. Many a good gift, and many a perfect gift, is ascribed either to the supposed merits of him who has received it, or to the supposed agency of a mere secondary cause. This delusion must be done away with, or rather the source from which it comes must be cleansed and purified. There are many signs of unconversion and inactive faith; and this is one. Our minister, no doubt,

¹ Deut. viii., 18.

² Gal. v., 8.

has often told us so, and here we have an opportunity of profiting by his lesson. As long as the thanks are given to man, and not to God, for benefits received, so long does pride, so long does ignorance, so long does partial unbelief, keep possession of the heart. May this meditation, with the help of God's grace, and the guidance of his word, go very far towards removing so dangerous a stumbling-block out of the way of every soul, and cause it, for the future, to ascribe, not unto itself, not unto an agency like unto itself, but unto the Lord alone, any good gift of wealth, knowledge, health, plenty, spiritual or temporal succour, it may receive.

Man confessedly does toil and labour for many things spiritual and temporal. But who gives the poor man power to work, or the rich man power to increase his riches? Who gives the knowledge implanted by education—the will and ability to do any kind act—above all, the grace whereof comes salvation? There can be but one source to which the power to do, to think, or to obtain any thing can be referred; and that source is “the Father of lights.” Even the very ordinary and regular recurrence of our present Sabbath worship must thus take its rise. The power to assemble, the power to give attention, the power to receive edification, must come from him, from whom every thing else good and perfect comes; and should be so regarded.

There is, however, one “good and perfect gift” above all other gifts good and perfect, to which especial attention is, on this account, due; and that good and perfect gift is, the gift of eternal life, of which the Apostle speaks when he says in the sentence next to that which we have been now considering, “of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.”

It pleased God to grant unto the times in which the Apostle and his fellow-believers lived, the first knowledge and earliest fruits of the Gospel, and to us who live in these times does he still grant that which to other people, nations, and languages, he denies—a knowledge of his will, as contained in the Gospel of his Son. And in this sense we are “a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.” Whence then does this gift, and the power to receive it, and the power to use it aright, come? Is it not the gift of God? Is it not in any and every sense his gift? Did he not confer it of his own free grace without any works, deservings, or seekings of ours? Did he not confer it when we were lost, but for him—helpless, but for him—in darkness,

in death, but for him? And is this acknowledged and testified by any of us to the extent it should be? Nay rather, I fear, is it not often explained away, misinterpreted, nay, sometimes even denied? "Those who go about to establish their own righteousness" do not "submit themselves unto the righteousness of God¹." They magnify their own goodness, rather than God's mercy. They are less thoughtful of their own sin than of the sin of others. To such the word of truth presents itself in all its majestic simplicity, and tells them with great plainness of speech, those particularly, if there be any such here assembled, who are wise in their own conceits, that, for the future, if they would be the real people of God, they must walk as such, "be swift to hear" what pertains to their souls, "slow to speak" their own praises, "slow to wrath," under the greatest provocation, willing to "lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness," and to "receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save their souls."

These, then, are the tests to which every member of a Christian family may submit himself, when he is called upon to give evidence, whether he is a member, by spiritual regeneration, of the great family of God; one of those few and promising disciples of Jesus, in whom the seed faith is bringing forth the fruit holiness. May the Holy Spirit of God now assist each of us in making this difficult search, and bring down every high look and lofty thought that stands in the way, to the lowly standard of the cross. May this best of all the good gifts that come down from the Father of lights now come down among us, and being itself "without variableness or shadow of turning," give present strength and stability to the word of truth now before us, and make us for the future, through its teaching, "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;" and eventually, being now received with meekness and obeyed in all things, be most mighty to save the soul.

"The Father of lights" from whom all this goodness comes, is, as we have seen, "without variableness or shadow of turning." Being thus unchangeable in himself, he must be in a like degree unchangeable in all that pertains to man. He must love him with an everlasting love—strengthen him with an everlasting strength—never leave him nor forsake him—under any trial or difficulty. Even if the heart be at times rebellious and unfaithful, still will not the Lord cast off the waverer as unprofitable. Yea,

¹ Rom. x., 3.

for a long time will the Spirit strive with the heart, even if it has wholly cast off its allegiance to a crucified Saviour, before it will fully depart for ever. But why, with such sure, such permanent, such unfailing protection, are any of us unstable? Why halt we between two opinions? Why would we serve God and Mammon? Why are we sometimes among those that serve Christ, and sometimes among those that serve him not? Why are we too often "tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine¹," every wind of passion, every wind of misfortune, that blows upon us? Having an unchangeable God, why are we an irresolute people? Heaven is eternal—love is unceasing—power is all sufficient—salvation is for ever. Be we then without variable-ness, even as our Father which is in heaven is without variable-ness. Be we "stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord²." Be we, if we make any change, changed once for all from instability to steadfastness, from darkness to light, from worldliness to spirituality, from sin to righteousness, from Satan unto God. Be our change, like the change of the seed, never for the worse, always for the better, never in need of renewal, always on the way unto perfection—the seed remaining in us—the Spirit descending on us—the fruit appearing in holiness—and the end, everlasting life.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE EPISTLE. *St. James i., 22 to 27.*

22 Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass :

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and conti-

nueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world.

The sum and substance of "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father," is here set forth; and it is a truth of

¹ Eph. iv., 14.

² 1 Cor. xv., 58.

most serious import. For if pure religion be really thus actively benevolent and essentially spiritual, and religion of this kind be alone acceptable "before God and the Father," then must the religion which is generally practised be unprofitable and vain. What in real truth is the religion of more than half the world? Nothing more than a religion of words, and names, and questions; a religion which enters not into the heart, but only comes from the mouth; a religion which calls on the name of the Lord, but has not faith to "enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by that new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the vail, that is to say, his flesh".

This is the religion of more than half of what is commonly called the Christian world. Such is it at this time, and such was it in danger of becoming when the Apostle wrote; and there cannot be a more spiritual or edifying employment for us of this family, than to learn what acceptable religion really is, and that it really is what it is rarely made, both practical and spiritual; fruitful in motives, trying to principles, and mighty to bring down natural appetites and unruly affections to the measure of the law of liberty exhibited in the Gospel. "Be ye doers of the word," says the Apostle, "and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." We have already heard the Apostle's summary definition of what he calls "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father;" and here he enters into a more detailed description of it. He informs his fellow-believers that they must be, what it is to be feared even at that time they were beginning not to be, doers of the work. He shows, that if men are "hearers only," they "deceive their own selves;" but that if they not only "look into the perfect law of liberty, but continue therein," then, as "doers of the work, they shall be blessed in their deed." And this doctrine perfectly accords with the doctrine of St. Paul's Epistles. St. Paul gives especial prominence to the doctrine of faith, because it was necessary to put the converts from Judaism on their guard against judaizing teachers; but, at the same time, he shows, in

¹ Heb. x., 20.

many places, that faith, if it is of the right sort, must necessarily bring forth fruit unto holiness¹. St. James, on the contrary seems to combat here the opposite error; and points out the mistake of those, who, too willing to escape from the bondage of Mosaic observances, made faith unfruitful. Both these Apostles, then, are intent upon the one object of "rightly dividing the word of truth²;" and if we will only take the trouble to "compare spiritual things with spiritual³," we shall find that all the inspired writers point to faith as the essence, and to holiness of life as the effect of "pure and undefiled religion."

Here the effect or sign of "pure and undefiled religion" is inculcated; and may we not be forgetful hearers! May we not presently "go our way, and straightway forget what manner of people we were!" May we not rise up presently from this meditation upon things spiritual, and, by losing all recollection of those natural deformities and deficiencies, which we have now, as in a glass, most clearly seen, show the emptiness and hollowness of our professions, show that we have been hearers only, and that we are resolved not to put in practice that self-denying spirituality and charity, which can only come of faith! But not only are spirituality and charity here set forth as the natural and necessary fruits of faith, but as tests which may try the boastings of all arrogant pretenders to religion. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, this man's religion is vain." Indeed there is nothing within the range of Christian obligation, that comes not under the searching scrutiny of him who really watches for his soul. May the number of those in this family, who strive to nourish themselves with the pure milk of the word, be daily increased. May all hearers who are not doers, soon hear that whereby they and their brethren may be saved. May the faith which comes by hearing be made every day in each of us more and more mighty to the pulling down of the strong-holds which sin has built up; and may the sin, whatsoever it be, thus brought to nought by the power of faith, be not only partially but wholly done away. Much may be effected by a careful consideration of the discourses we hear on the Lord's day. Much must depend upon the spirit in which we listen to those discourses. Be it remembered, above all, that all

¹ Tit. iii., 8. Phil. i., 9, 10, 11. Heb. xi., throughout. Rom. xii., xiii. Eph. iv., v., vi.

² 2 Tim. ii., 15.

³ 1 Cor. ii., 13.

profession is vain that does not tend to practice, that all hearing is unprofitable that does not minister to doing; and that he is alone and eminently blessed, who "is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work;" who "looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues therein;" who hears the word of God and keeps it.

Is this our state at present, or is it not? Much depends upon the issue; the favour or wrath of God; the welfare or ill of the soul; the peace or distress of conscience; the attainment or forfeiture of salvation. Are we hearers but not doers? We shall know by the fruits. We shall regularly hear the word preached; but we shall not remember or follow it. We shall not "bridle the tongue, but deceive our own heart." We shall not "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." We shall not "keep ourselves unspotted from the world." And so being only hearers but not doers, our religion will be vain, and our final salvation hopeless. A change, however, effected by the Holy Spirit of God, will bring us out of this perilous condition, and Christ, if we will only turn, will save us. His grace will remove the delusion, restore the soul, renew the spirit, and pour into the heart "pure and undefiled religion."

And what sign shall follow them that really believe after this fashion? They shall be doers as well as hearers; they shall not be "forgetful hearers;" they shall "bridle the tongue;" they shall "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction;" they shall "keep themselves unspotted from the world." These signs shall follow them that believe, and by these shall they be known. Is it not then an easy thing to ascertain our true and actual condition? May we not readily discover by these evidences, what we are at present, and what we should be in future? Let the inquiry at once be made, and made with prayer and supplication. Let us beseech the Lord to show us what we are and what we ought to be, to lead us in the right way, to bring us into immediate captivity to the obedience of Christ, and to keep us in the same to the end of our days. Let us, in particular, beseech him not to allow our piety to evaporate in sounds and appearances, but to give it, daily, more strength, clearer developement, and greater durability. Let us beseech him especially to give us the spirit of prayer, the power of utterance, the faith to ask of God, and to ask, confident of receiving. And if this be granted to us, and we really do obtain God's "merciful assistance in our

tial to her truest interests as this ; and gladly should every member of the Church, be his worldly station and relative position what it may, ascend in spirit to the heavens on the day of its celebration, and by faith see Jesus, his ascended Mediator and Advocate, standing on the right hand of God. How should his sordid thoughts and worldly affections die within him, kindle into faith and spirituality, and entirely change their character. An ascended, and therefore an accepted Saviour, gives the soul something substantial to go upon: sure mercies—endless love—omnipotent love—ratified forgiveness.

But further, the faith of a Christian must regard the ascended Jesus in another capacity, namely, that of one who is to come again; of one who is to be the great Judge of all the earth. Faith may rejoice in the free grace of Christ, but it must be greatly overwhelmed with awe at his office of vengeance; for it is the office of faith to look forward as well as backward, and see that same Jesus, who was taken up from earth to heaven, “so coming in like manner, as he was seen to go into heaven.” And whatever be the Christian’s spiritual state, he must, whether sinner or believer, if he ever thinks at all, thus think of Jesus, think of him as a Saviour and a Judge, think of him with joy, think of him with reverence. But how greatly will the hope preponderate over the fear, in the assurance that the Redeemer will “come, in like manner as he was seen to go into heaven,” will come as a merciful Judge, as a God full of love, as the Word made flesh, as the incarnate Son of Man. Be this the joy of the believer, the comfort of the afflicted, the hope of the penitent, as well as the lesson of the ignorant, and the sting of the wayward and reprobate.

Be this doctrine, then, the appearance in judgment, the acceptance as Saviour, of an ascended Son of Man, useful to all, but especially to us of this family. Worldliness, to which in a family, as well as elsewhere, there is always great temptation, may be making us either formal in prayer or weak in faith. “Cumbered,” like Martha, “about much serving¹,” cumbered with domestic anxieties, cumbered with the pleasures or troubles of this life, we are in danger of losing all relish for prayer, or of carrying our faith no further than prayer. This temptation to a prayerless life, to a spiritless prayer, must be watched, marked, resisted, as often as it besets us; and the first great aim of the soul must be, distracted and burdened as it is

¹ Luke x., 40.

with temporal avocations, to "have the conversation in heaven¹." And when this blessed consummation is, by God's grace, wholly or in part attained, the next care must be, to give to our spiritual gifts both right direction and due regulation, and instead of exhausting them in sounds and forms, in flights and fancies, in prayers and sentiments, to spread them distinctly and broadly over the whole life, to infuse them into all the conversation, and give them the high, the holy, the daily office of preparing the soul for him, who "shall some time or other come, as he was seen to go into heaven."

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION DAY.

THE EPISTLE. 1 *St. Peter* iv., 7 to 11.

7 The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

9 Use hospitality one to another without grudging.

10 As every man hath received the gift, *even so* minister the same

one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

11 If any man speak, *let him speak* as the oracles of God: if any man minister, *let him do it* as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

The great truth, with which the Apostle here sets out, is the great truth above all others, which most nearly concerns man, and affords him most solemn warning. How grievous is it to him to hear, that there must be "an end of all things," how still more grievous to hear, that "the end of all things is at hand." He would rather, in the pride of his unconverted heart, in the self-will of his fleshly mind, live in torment for ever, than part with his sensual gratifications for a moment. He would rather deceive himself with the vain delusion, that death is far off and retribution long in coming, than make any immediate preparation for what may come at any time.

Such are the feelings, the fancies, the imaginations, with which man strives to evade the fact of his mortality, to forget what he would do far better to remember, to put partially out of sight what he dare not altogether disbelieve. But why should man be at such pains to keep death out of his thoughts? And why does he try to persuade himself that it is far off? Does it seem so very terrible in itself? Does the parting of soul and

¹ Philip. iii., 20.

body, and that alone, connect itself with the notion of death? It must certainly be acknowledged that death has its terrors, its own natural terrors; but is it not distasteful on other accounts? Yes, there is in death an everlasting loss of the pleasures of sin, the pleasures of sense, the pleasures of the world. And there is in death a prospect of judgment; of most terrible, most just judgment. Punishment for all past indulgence in the pleasures of sin, vengeance upon all friends of the world and enemies of God, wrath against "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness¹," these are the awful assurances which carry terror to the soul of the sinner. His conviction of these truths fills him with misgivings; his anticipation of these calamities makes him afraid; and he flies instinctively from a doctrine which has no charms for a sinner, puts all his imaginary peace to everlasting flight, and "drowns him in destruction and perdition*." And notwithstanding this disinclination of the sinner to entertain the thought, time never slackens in its pace. "The end of all things" is as much at hand as it was at first, and still do we hasten towards it. Indeed while a man is "serving divers lusts and pleasures," "giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils," hearkening unto himself more than unto God, this dreaded "end of all things" is drawing nearer at hand. Even the time spent in our present meditations, short as it may appear, has brought us all somewhat nearer in its own small measure, to "the end of all things."

Such being the case, we who are here assembled, have a great burden imposed upon us, a great truth to learn, a great motive to turn to account. We are all, I imagine, more or less in the situation of the sinner just described, unwilling to think of "the end of all things," still more unwilling to think that it is "at hand." The sting of "the end of all things" is sin, and the cause of the soul's unwillingness to think of "the end of all things" is sin. But the proud heart of man will not acknowledge sin, and therefore will not acknowledge him who can alone be the Saviour of sinners. Are we, any of us, some of us, all of us, in this condition, fearful of the consequences of sin, but slow to throw off its burden, believing Jesus Christ to be a Judge, but shunning him as a Saviour? Wherever this is the case, there must be a change, a total change, and from henceforth a settled conviction, that if "one died for all, then were all dead,

¹ Rom. i., 18.

* 1 Tim. vi., 9.

and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again¹." Let his offers, his most advantageous offers constrain us thus to judge, thus to turn to God, thus to admit conviction. God is willing to make the sinner righteous, to "take away his heart of stone and give him a heart of flesh²," to justify him, sanctify him, glorify him, if he will only on his part freely acknowledge his sin, throw himself on the mercy of God, and sue, in all humbleness of mind, for pardon and peace. And this being done, all the good things that can be desired or expected will follow, all those personal, spiritual, social, and domestic qualities which spring from a lively faith, form the perfect man, and make the soul meet for eternity.

The Apostle here enumerates many of these with much particularity, and recommends them with great earnestness. His observations begin with an incentive to increased diligence in the discharge of these obligations. "The end of all things is at hand." And his concluding words in effect are, that the fruits of a true reliance on the merits of Jesus Christ must be practically diffused through all the conversation, and that if they are, they will minister, as they ought, in the most comprehensive manner and through the only available channel, to the glory of God. Is this the case with those who are here assembled? Are they living examples of the faith they profess? Do they in effect prove, by their life and conversation, that they renounce sin and strive after holiness, and all through faith in him who is the atonement for sin and Giver of every good gift? In a word, do they prepare for an "end of all things?" Soberness, watchfulness unto prayer, fervent charity among themselves, hospitality one to another without grudging, speech in conformity with the oracles of God, ministration according to the ability that God giveth, these are some of the evidences of sincerity in the cause of Christ; and Christ will require them at the hands of his people. Let each of us lay this to heart, and ask himself, upon the basis of these evidences, what is his present state in the sight of God. Let him ask the question solemnly; let him answer the question deliberately; let him consider the question impartially; let him give to each point here brought forward, its due portion of attention; and the Spirit which "takes of the Lord's and shows it" unto his disciples, shall "guide him into all truth³."

¹ 2 Cor. v., 14, 15.² Ezek. xxxvi., 26.³ John xvi., 13, 15.

WHIT SUNDAY.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Acts ii.*, 1 to 11.

WHEN the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because

that every man heard them speak in his own language.

7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another. Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?

8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

This is the day on which we commemorate the feast of Whitsuntide, called Pentecost in the Jewish Church, because it was kept forty-nine days, or seven weeks after the feast of the Passover¹; and distinguished in the Christian Church, because it was the day on which the Saviour's promise² of the gift of the Holy Ghost was in a most extraordinary manner fulfilled. The Epistle for the day contains an account of this latter remarkable event, and, beyond all doubt, it has been with this view selected. It states that while the Apostles "were all with one accord in one place," "suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, which filled all the house where they were sitting." It states also that "there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and that it sat upon each of them, and that they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." "Now when this was noised abroad," the historian goes on to say, "the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one

¹ The Hebrews called this feast, the feast of Weeks, (*Exod. xxxiv.*, 22,) because it was kept seven weeks after the Passover; see also *Levit. xxiii.*, 10, 11.

² *John xiv.*, 16, 17, 26.

to another, behold are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born?" And then the inspired writer proceeds to inform us further, that so palpable was the power of "speaking with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance," that "devout men out of almost every nation under heaven" heard the Apostles speak, in the tongues peculiar to their own countries, "the wonderful works of God."

The extraordinary circumstances connected with this transaction were: first, the existence of a power or faculty of speaking with other tongues; and secondly, the communication of that miraculous power or faculty to Galileans, men most unpolished and unlettered, and devoid of all capacity and intelligence. In general, a knowledge of other tongues can only be gained after severe study, and by men of some capacity and attainments. But in this case the knowledge of other tongues was gained in a moment, and by men who were most illiterate and ignorant. And the effects of the miracle were manifest to so many, and to men of so many different nations, and at the same moment, that none could be deceived. Thus did God work a special miracle for the furtherance of truth, and provide a special evidence for the establishment of its credibility. And thus do we obtain the true foundation of this day's observance, which is, not because it is the feast of Pentecost, and an important incident in Jewish history, but because it commemorates the first miraculous effusion of the Holy Ghost. The name given in our prayer books to this day, *Whit Sunday*, is supposed to have originated in the colour of the vestments anciently worn by baptized persons, this having been the day on which baptism was most frequently administered in the early church, and white vestments having been usually worn on such occasions by the candidates for baptism.

And now the very grave consideration arises, how we may derive edification from this portion of Scripture, and what is the edification which it affords. First, we should feel very thankful for the signal instance of God's mercy to the Church recorded in this day's history. The effusion, as at this time, of the Holy Ghost, caused the Gospel to take deep root in the hearts of the people, and enabled the preachers of the Gospel "to go forth in the strength of the Lord God¹," and to plant what "grew mightily and prevailed²". The fruits of that seed-time of the

¹ Pa. LXXI., 16.

² Acts XIX., 20.

faith we of the present day enjoy, and blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath made that branch of his planting to take root downward and bear fruit upward. Further, we must not only feel thankful for that inestimable benefit, but increase our faith in the Author of it. He who could send forth such demonstrations of his power, and establish on so immovable a foundation the evidences of his Gospel, must indeed be God. Again, we are assured, in this Scripture, of the faithfulness of God, who both promised and performed. Let trust in this faithful God continue, even as his faithfulness to his promise continues. Once more, what weak instruments were on this occasion chosen to work out the designs of God? Shall despairing sinners ever despair, shall ignorant brethren ever toil in vain after knowledge, shall inveterate worldlings ever really find the world too strong for them, if Christ is strongest in his people's weakness, and can choose despised Galileans to be messengers of the churches, and stewards of the mysteries of God? And finally, we are here told of an extraordinary operation of the Holy Ghost, which has ceased, but has been followed by another operation of the same Spirit, which works as effectually, though not so visibly. This operation will work, if we will only give it free course, in all our hearts. But feelings, and thoughts, and imaginations, are not alone sufficient to establish the fact of this operation, nor can they make out a claim for any of us, of themselves, to the title of sons of God. As the works which the Apostles did in former days, proved them to be those on whom the gift of tongues had fallen, so must certain fruits of the Spirit known and read of all men, and explained and set forth in the Bible, prove us to have the gifts of the Spirit.

If the recurrence of this festival puts us upon the inquiry, and leads us into a train of thought ministering to such inquiry, it will not have now been celebrated in vain. The fruits of the Spirit are enumerated by St. Paul, and St. Paul is accessible to all. "The fruits of the Spirit are in all goodness and righteousness and truth¹." They are "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance²." If we are without these, whatever be our profession, whatever our inward excitement, we are without the Spirit: and if we are without the Spirit, we are without Christ, and are none of his. With them, on the contrary, we are Christ's, and can offer evidence not to be gainsayed, that we have really "crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts³."

¹ Eph. v., 9.² Gal. v., 22, 23.³ Gal. v., 24.

MONDAY IN WHITSUN WEEK.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Acts x., 34 to 48.*

34 ¶ Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

37 That word, *I say*, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;

41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God,

even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

44 ¶ While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

The greater part of this address of the Apostle to the people is a recapitulation of the history of Jesus as contained in the Gospels, and was accompanied and followed by an extraordinary effusion of the Holy Ghost, and also followed by the immediate baptism of those who had heard the word and received of the Spirit. The people thus highly favoured were Gentiles, men not belonging to the Jewish nation, and hence, in the opinion of all Jews, even of Jews who had embraced the Gospel, beyond the pale of salvation. The Apostle¹, in particular, who bore a chief part in this ministration, had, in common with his pre-

¹ Gal. ii., 11 to 14.

judiced brethren, imbibed this opinion, and it had doubtless been a special object of the ministration in question, not only to set on foot the great work of Gentile conversion, but to remove the prejudice which existed on the subject among the Jews. All this let us now spiritualize.

And first, be it observed, that the main object of Peter's speech is to show, that the Gentiles, that is, all the world, were within the pale of salvation. Let this check uncharitableness. If God be so merciful, can man limit his mercy? God pronounces no final judgment till the day of judgment. Before that time, any, even the greatest sinners, may be saved. "Who art thou that judgest another." The same grace of God which is necessary for him may be profitable to thee. He wants faith; thou lackest charity. Look into thine own heart, and root out uncharitableness. Again, let this history open the ears and eyes of the prejudiced. Peter and his brethren of the circumcision, prejudiced and bigoted as they were, were convinced of their error. The formalist in these days may be opposed to the truth, as it is plainly set forth in the Gospel, and be only willing to receive it in his own way. In particular, he may not admit the doctrines of man's corruption by nature, and Christ's imputed righteousness, in their fulness. Let him candidly inquire, wherever this is the case, and in particular, consult Scripture. However mistaken in some points, he can never assert his own infallibility, or gainsay Scripture. And in the search, while the mind is thus musing, may grace remove pride, which is the great stumbling-block. May the understanding be opened, faith increased, and the Lord alone exalted.

Once more, let the unbounded and universal application of Christ's death and merits to a whole world, be an encouragement to lost sinners. "In every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him." "Through the name of Jesus, *whosoever* believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." "The promise is unto all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." The sin, great as it is and has been, may be blotted out. There goes a virtue out of the blood of a Saviour which heals it all. There issues a voice from the Scriptures of truth, which saith, "come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". Further, let the universality of redemption unite the hearts of all of us, as the heart of one man, in promoting the cause of

¹ James iv., 12.

² Matt. xi., 28.

missions¹. Each of us, in our relative vocation, may do something in that cause. It is not he alone that preaches, and carries the message of redemption, that is instrumental in converting the heathen. Each in his own rank of life may assist in setting the springs in motion, which are indispensable, humanly speaking, toward carrying on the work. He may make some little offering himself, and collect little offerings from others. And there cannot be a more hopeful sphere of action for him, than the house wherein he dwells, the people with whom he sojourns.

Two circumstances occurred, the one when Peter's speech was proceeding, the other when it was concluded, which are worthy of notice. "The Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." They were heard to "speak with tongues and magnify God." The Holy Ghost, doubtless, still accompanies the ministration of the word, whether in public or private. As it fell on them that heard the word in the house of Cornelius, so, doubtless, may it fall on them that hear it in this house. May our hearts be ever open to receive it, without which it cannot be granted. May we ever be faithful hearers, and bring forth those fruits of hearing in the family circle, which shall edify many and "magnify God." The other circumstance was, that those upon whom the Holy Ghost had been thus poured out were immediately baptized. This warns us of the importance of baptism, as an initiatory rite; of its connection with spiritual influences; of its claim to be done decently and in order; of its sacredness as an ordinance of God. We have all been baptized; but do we receive the Holy Ghost? do we bring forth the fruits of the Spirit? Do we, in our inward principle as well as outward profession, "follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and become like unto him?" Let each of us consider these matters well, and "the Lord give us understanding in all things!"

¹ The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the most ancient Missionary society in our Church, is ready to receive all contributions, however small, in aid of the work of missions. The Church Missionary Society, and the Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews, are also well worthy of the attention of churchmen.

² Baptismal Service.

TUESDAY IN WHITSUN WEEK.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Acts viii., 14 to 17.*

14 Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

17 Then laid they *their* hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

In this passage we have an account of the administration of a rite which is most surely received amongst us, even the rite of Confirmation. From this passage we gather, that belief in "the word of God," and baptism "in the name of the Lord Jesus," are the earliest of spiritual obligations, and that Confirmation, or laying on of hands, then follows, when sufficient proof is given that the right foundation is laid. It appears also, that prayer and the laying on of hands were always connected with this rite, and that they were supposed to procure for those in whose case they were administered, the gift of the Holy Ghost. And it may be noted, further, that the first administrations of this ancient rite in the primitive Church were committed to the *chief pastors* of the Church, and hence we derive the orderly custom of receiving it from the hands of bishops. Thus does the modern Christian Church agree with the primitive, in first administering baptism to its members, and afterwards Confirmation; in administering confirmation through the outward visible form of prayer and laying on of hands; in administering it through bishops; and in expecting to receive from it, so administered, that blessed gift, which, on this particular occasion, the Samaritan converts, when Peter and John had "laid their hands on them," actually did receive, namely, the Holy Ghost.

The first practical point to be remembered is, that we, as churchmen, do not trace our constitution and history as a Church to a mere "cunningly devised fable" or a mere modern human authority, but to the Apostles and companions of him to whom the Church owes its origin. Here is a particular instance, in which we see our Church resting "upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner-stone¹;" and from this we may infer the antiquity and apostolical character of the doctrine and discipline of

¹ Collect for St. Simon and St. Jude's day.

our Church, and be enabled to "give an answer to every one that asketh us a reason of the hope," which, through the teaching of the Church, "is in us, with meekness and fear¹." Another practical point to be remembered is, that the gift of the Holy Ghost, through the medium of baptism and Confirmation, has, in all probability, descended on all of us, not in the full measure of the apostolic times, not perchance "in the measure pressed down, shaken together and running over," which brings forth much fruit, but in the measure which may suffice for edification, if it meets with cooperation.

To the fruits then of Confirmation, and the improvement of its spiritual gifts and privileges, let us give, as we are most bounden, more earnest attention. Promises were made at Confirmation, and made most solemnly, in our own names, in the house of God, and in the presence of the chief ministers and other pastors of the Church, that the things undertaken for us by our godfathers and godmothers, should from henceforth be duly performed and done. Were these promises made lightly? Were these obligations undertaken without thought? However this may be, the deliberate engagement of Confirmation, entered upon under such peculiar circumstances, makes faith more sacredly binding, more imperatively urgent than ever. And although, even without such an engagement and promise, our duties ought never to have sat lightly upon us, still is there something solemnly binding in the promise at Confirmation, which must make failure very awful, fulfilment very imperative.

But there is another point of view in which this passage may teach us a practical lesson; and this is, that not only Confirmation but all the means of grace carry with them a spiritual character, and are accompanied by the Holy Ghost. Little, I fear, is this truth heeded by us. Sabbaths, and weeks, and years, abundant in ministrations to sanctification, pass away unheeded, and become, in their abuse, so many ministrations to condemnation. Christ crucified and man corrupt, the Father reconciled, the sinner called, the Comforter come, the transgression done away, tribulation to the reprobate, glory to the righteous, these, and many more than these, are the truths of the Gospel, taught in schools, preached in churches, studied in families from day to day. "O that there were such an heart" in God's people, and especially in this portion of it, that they

¹ 1 Pet. iii., 15.

would "fear him, and keep all his commandments always, that it might be well with them and with their children for ever¹."

TRINITY SUNDAY.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Rev. iv., 1 to the end.*

AFTER this I looked, and, behold, a door *was* opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard *was* as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.

2 And immediately I was in the Spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and *one* sat on the throne.

3 And he that sat was to look upon^{*} like a jasper and a sardine stone: and *there was* a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

4 And round about the throne *were* four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and *there were* seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which^{*} are the seven Spirits of God.

6 And before the throne *there was* a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and

round about the throne, *were* four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

7 And the first beast *was* like a lion, and the second beast *was* like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast *was* like a flying eagle.

8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which *was, and is, and is to come.*

9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,

10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

The Church has evidently selected this mysterious portion of Scripture for our meditation, under an impression that it refers, however indirectly, to what St. Paul calls, "the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ²." It will not be necessary for us, assembled as we are here for a practical rather than a speculative purpose, to enter into a nice investigation of the doctrine of the Trinity, or of the "substance, power, and

¹ Deut. v., 29.

² Col. ii., 2.

eternity¹," as the Article describes it, of "three Persons in one Godhead." This will not be necessary; but it will certainly be right to state, that Scripture is our warrant for the doctrine, and that the passages of Scripture most distinctly affirming the doctrine, are the following: "Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost²." "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all³." Jesus says himself in the following passages, "I and my Father are one⁴." "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things⁵." "The Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will⁶." "The Son abideth for ever⁷." "The Spirit or Holy Ghost searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God⁸." "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and lo the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased⁹."

These passages indicate, with more or less particularity, the individual and collective existence of three divine Persons, and furnish a most infallible warrant for our belief in it as a most undoubted, although a most incomprehensible doctrine of Scripture. The beloved disciple, who was "in the Spirit" when he saw and wrote what he here reveals to us, is the only inspired writer to whom it has been permitted, with any thing like particularity, to reveal mysteries connected with another world; and even he has only been permitted to do it "through a glass, darkly." He describes with apparent minuteness, but with most unexampled sublimity, him who sits on the throne in the heavens,—the company round about the throne,—and the throne itself. And he points out, in particular, the humble posture assumed by the heavenly company, the unwearied assiduity with which they prosecute their work of praise and thanksgiving; and the significant language in which they offer it, to him whom they glorify without ceasing. "The four-and-twenty elders fall down before him that sitteth on the throne; they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was,

¹ Art. i.² Matt. xxviii., 19.³ 2 Cor. xiii. 14.⁴ John x., 30.⁵ John xiv., 26.⁶ John v., 21.⁷ John viii., 35.⁸ 1 Cor. ii., 10.⁹ Matt. iii., 16, 17.

and is, and is to come." We must however note especially the apparent acknowledgment of a Trinity by these blessed spirits, or elders as they are here called, in their adoration of the Majesty on high. They say, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," "when they give glory and honour and thanks to him that sits on¹ the throne;" and so did the Cherubim and Seraphim, when Isaiah saw his vision in the Temple¹. And we must also note the humility with which "angels and arch-angels and all the company of heaven laud and magnify the Lord's glorious name²." "The four-and-twenty elders fall down before him that sitteth on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever; and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

Having thus noticed some of the clearest proofs of the doctrine of a Trinity to be found in Scripture, and having noticed the especial reference here made to it in the hymn of the elders, we may now bestow attention with benefit upon the practical truths it teaches. Let us make the doctrine of the Trinity an exercise of faith. It is a truth which we cannot comprehend. Is it not then an exercise of faith? For what is faith, but a reliance on what has been revealed, because God has revealed it; and a reliance on what has been revealed, even though eye has not seen the thing revealed, or reason comprehended it? Then let such be the faith, the simple, child-like, trusting faith of every Christian who desires to be saved. Let such be his faith, a faith that needs not to see clearly, or comprehend entirely, in order to believe; and he will find no difficulty in his way. If he has not this faith, let him pray for it; and if he has it in any measure, let him pray for more; and if the larger measure has been vouchsafed to him, let him retain it, and it will overcome the world, overcome sin, overcome every thing, and carry him on safely toward the gate that leads to everlasting life. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches humility. Humbly do the spirits of the just adore the great Three in One; and well may we, who are so much lower than the angels, do the same; bring down our high looks and lofty thoughts; "mortify our members which are upon the earth³;" acknowledge our great unworthiness; and "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ⁴."

¹ Isai. vi. 3.² Communion Service.³ Col. iii., 5.⁴ 2 Cor. x., 5.

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches a thankful remembrance of redemption. It shows that we have not only one Father, but one Saviour, and one Holy Ghost; and that atonement for sin and sanctification of sinners is involved in it. May we never forget this, but at all times and seasons, and particularly while the Sundays in Trinity are proceeding, thankfully remember that to a Trinity in Unity we owe, if we have faith to receive it, forgiveness of sins and sanctification unto obedience.

And the doctrine of the Trinity teaches, finally, unity among believers. There is infinite consent and harmony in the counsels of a Triune God. Peace then may there be in this house and among all that dwell in it; peace, coming down from the fountain of peace; peace, connecting all whose conversation is in heaven in one holy bond of love and truth, of faith and charity; and peace, bringing all who at present are not in peace, "in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ¹." The beloved disciple says, that the things he saw were "the things which must be hereafter." If such be the case, and the things which must be hereafter are the things which we really desire, we shall, with the help of God's grace, be conformed to the blessed saints in all the particulars of which we have been speaking; and strive, as well as pray, to "do the will of God, even as it is done in heaven²."

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. 1 *St. John* iv., 7 to the end.

7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

¹ Eph. iv., 13.

² The Lord's Prayer.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; be-

cause fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

19 We love him, because he first loved us.

20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

The great object, beyond a doubt, of this portion of Scripture, is, to constrain Christ's disciples, by every argument that can be adduced—by every motive that can be urged—by every persuasion that can have force—to “love one another.” He tells them, that “love is of God;” derived from him—implanted by him—made effectual through him. He tells them, that love is an attribute of God—set forth as an example—and especially set forth as an example in the mission of a Saviour. He tells them, that love is a principle of grateful acknowledgment on the part of man; of original concession on the part of God. He tells them, that “God is love” itself, not merely the prevailing feature, but the abstract quality. He tells them, that love has no fear for the future, being humbly confident in the Atonement, and habitually active in good works. And he tells them, that “he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

If love is of God; if love, as an attribute of God, has been exemplified in the mission of a Saviour; if love, as a principle in man, has its origin in the blessings he enjoys; if love is as fearless in its anticipations as warm in its affections; if God is love itself, and man, when he dwells in love, has gained the privilege of dwelling in God, then must it be man's highest honour, greatest happiness, and most undeniable edification, to possess this grace in perfection; and all should strive by faith, by prayer, by practice, by self-denial, to attain unto it. Neither must it be forgotten, that among the inducements here held out to Christians to love one another, are arguments of a somewhat opposite kind, and of a much more severe description, than those we have just been considering. “He that loveth not, knoweth not God.” “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.” “He that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?” These passages lead to the conclusion, that

without love of man, there can neither be love of God, nor knowledge of God: a state most truly alarming, because indicating a total absence of first principles, as well as a present exclusion from the kingdom of God.

Such are the motives, some encouraging, others alarming, by which the Apostle would constrain all Christian people to love one another. Be this, then, an object at which we ever aim; these the motives by which we are ever guided. We have many outward bonds of union, and are, in many senses, outwardly, brethren. We are creatures of one Creator, citizens of one country, disciples of one master, members of one family, partakers of the same frailty, heirs of the same promises, sons of one church, worshippers of one God. In our nature, our origin, our country, our habitation, our faith, our church, our worship, we are one. United by so many ties, connected in so many ways, we possess nearly all the outward characteristics, except that of blood, of brethren; and even this, perhaps, some of us have. What else is wanting to make the picture perfect? That community of feeling, that union of interests, that desire and endeavour for the good of all around us, that agreement in things of importance, that avoidance of subjects of contention, that peace amongst ourselves, that love of one another, that harmony in every thing, which marks the near relationship of brotherhood. In other words, each of us should have engraven on his heart, and exemplified in his life, that truly brotherly doctrine of "dwelling in love."

And not only should our love of one another be the love of brethren; it should also be the love that takes its measure and quality from the love of God, as manifested in the mission of his Son. "In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." "God commended his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us!" "He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not, with him also, freely give us all things?" "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." We ought to "be of one mind and live in peace¹." We ought to "be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another²." We ought to do all the good we can one to another, and never do one

¹ Rom. v., 8.

² Rom. viii., 32.

³ 2 Cor. viii., 11.

⁴ Rom. xii., 10.

another harm, or give one another pain. We ought to "love as brethren, and be pitiful and courteous, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise, blessing¹." We ought to pray for one another's spiritual welfare,—sanctification,—edification,—redemption. We ought continually to do our best to "comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak²," exercise patience toward all around us, as we have opportunity, and occasion is given.

This will it really be to dwell in love; and then "God," as the Apostle speaks, will "dwell in us;" be with us, in us, amongst us. He will make us his habitation, because we make ours his. He will make us a united family, giving us of his Spirit, imparting unto us his righteousness, and making us, although many, yet one body in Christ.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. 1 St. John iii., 13 to the end.

13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death.

15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of *compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

19 And hereby we know that we

are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, *then* have we confidence toward God.

22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

The subject of love, as on the last Lord's day, is again presented to us, and in the hands of the beloved disciple, with increased attraction. In the Epistle for the last Lord's day, there was an enumeration of the many and powerful motives

¹ 1 Pet. iii., 8. 9.

² 1 Thess. v., 14.

which should constrain Christian people, and especially Christian families, to love one another. Here we have the same love brought to bear upon us in the shape of a test of the doctrine of assurance, and as a method whereby we may ascertain the true character of our spiritual position; the sincerity or insincerity of our professions; the accuracy or inaccuracy of our feelings as signs of growth in grace; the truth or falsehood of our declarations of faith in Christ; the practical tendency or otherwise of our knowledge of the Gospel of Christ.

And before we proceed to examine the Apostle's doctrine with reference to this subject, let us comprehend why we should examine it. The truth is, that man, even believing and right-minded man, is too prone to rest upon that kind of religion which gives him the least trouble, and in his zeal to make a fair appearance, is too readily betrayed into spiritual indolence. Now, as experience proves that a religion of words and names does sometimes gain the ascendancy, in the soul, over a religion of deeds and affections,—as “zeal not according to knowledge” does sometimes take the place of zeal of the right sort,—and spiritual indolence is known to be spiritually dangerous,—this portion of Scripture may tend greatly to our edification, if we will regard it as furnishing a good test of assurance. The only way of “knowing that we have passed from death unto life,” it states, is, “because we love the brethren;” and it is a sure sign that we are “abiding in death,” if we “love not our brother.” Do we regard our brother, be he of high or of low degree, with a feeling that amounts to love? Are we ready, on the principle of faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God, to do him any good we can, yea, even to lay down our lives for him? Are his interests preferred to ours in transactions with the world? Are we ready to go the same length for him, according to our measure and opportunity, that Christ went for the whole world, ready to serve him at a sacrifice, ready to advise him for his good, even at the risk of offending him, to come to his assistance at a season when every other friend has deserted him? These are questions of moment, and we should not decide them hastily, as self-love may perchance prompt us. The fact most carefully to be borne in mind is, that upon the answer to these questions positively depends, whether the soul is at present in a state of reconciliation with God, or at enmity with him.

Further, a still more specific test is supplied, by which it

¹ Rom. x., 2.

may easily and at any time be known, whether we "love in word and in tongue, or in deed and in truth?" "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" This must be a sure method of ascertaining how far we are in reality "of the truth, and can assure our hearts" before God, for it brings us to the final point to which any investigation of this kind can be carried, the judgment which the soul passes upon its own conduct. A man may seem to love his brother; he may even give very strong outward proof of it in an act of well-timed charity; but, perchance, all the while the principle of love may not be within his heart, and although he may give liberally and speak kindly, he may both give and speak in the spirit of ostentation. In order to do away with the possibility of self-deception in so grave a matter, appeal is here made to *the heart*; and the heart, unless very hardened, will generally give judgment with impartiality, and according to evidence. "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things." "And if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God," and a most true foundation for assurance in his sight.

Thus do we obtain the general outline of a course of self-examination on the important question, whether we have that love of one another which warrants assurance—that love of one another which is founded on faith in the Son of God—and is instilled into our hearts by his Spirit dwelling in us. By laying down our lives for the brethren, by not shutting up our bowels of compassion from needy brethren, by keeping all the commandments of God, by keeping them on a principle of faith, by experience, a rational well-grounded experience, of the Spirit dwelling in us, and, finally, by "our heart not condemning us," do we at last attain unto an assurance, humble indeed and self-distrustful, but still an assurance, that "we have passed from death unto life." But by hating our brother, by "shutting up our bowels of compassion from him," by loving him only in word and in tongue, and by our heart condemning us in all these particulars, we may rest satisfied that "we have not eternal life abiding in us."

Next to an entrance into heaven itself, there cannot be a more glorious privilege than the assurance of which we are speaking; but it is in reality most difficult to attain, and only to be known and proved by the marks here supplied by the

Apostle. What peace, here on earth, can be equal to that of him who has good reason to know, upon the best authority, that he has "passed from death unto life;" that he is "of the truth;" that he can receive of God whatever he asks; that the blessed Spirit of God actually does "abide in him!" Can any toil, or sacrifice, or self-abasement, be too great to work out so glorious a consummation? "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." Gladly will the soul endure any thing, believe any thing, conquer any difficulty, if it can only by these means, in due time, walk by this rule,—mind this thing,—and eventually reach that "measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," which will justify assurance.

Be this, then, the aim, the labour, the work, and finally, if possible, the achievement of every one of us—the desire of our whole hearts—the labour of our whole lives—the work of our whole day of grace. The modest confidence, that the soul, through grace, is in present safety, if the soul through grace will only persevere, will thus in the end be attained; and that most glorious of all spiritual eminence, after much trial and labour of love, will be fully secured, which, next to heaven itself and preparatory to heaven itself, should be the high and holy ambition of every child of God.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. 1 *St. Peter* v., 5 to 11.

5 All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

10 But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

11 To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

The spiritual gift to which the Apostle here gives most prominent place is humility,—and, unfortunately, it is still so rare, even in these enlightened days of the Church, that few even of Christ's most advanced disciples are sufficiently imbued with its

spirit. Humility was so remarkably set forth by our Lord himself, both in his example and conversation, and afterwards so prominently taught by all his apostles, by all, I mean, whose writings remain to this present time, that it is rightly made to hold a very high rank among those fruits of faith and of the Spirit which "are in all goodness and righteousness and truth¹." Humility, however, like every other principle of action, must be known by its fruits; and unless it is thus distinguished, it cannot possibly exist. It is very easy to talk of humility, as it is to talk of any thing without practising it. Indeed, the loveliness of complete perfection might be extolled in most eloquent language, but none could ever attain unto it. By its fruits, then, must humility be known; by practical proofs of it amongst ourselves; by lively exemplifications of it in all the relations of life in which we may be placed. It can be no real token of humility to recommend it; it can be no certain indication of humility to receive the recommendation with attention. But the true sign of humility is, to show it on some occasion wherein hitherto we have not shown it, and to pray at this present time, that the word now spoken in its praise may not be spoken in vain.

To *all* is the injunction addressed, "Be ye clothed with humility." There are some ranks of life, some conditions of men, that might seem exempt from the discharge of its obligations. Some men have few, others, scarcely any human superiors. But still, *all* must "be clothed with humility." Those who have scarcely any superiors in fortune, power, influence, station, may have many who are superiors in spirituality, faith, character, mind, discretion. And if there be any person (and there is but one in this country) who has no earthly superior, still is there a "King of kings, and Lord of lords" above, before whose heavenly foot-stool "every knee must bow, and every tongue confess that He alone is Lord, to the glory of God the Father²." But it is not on those alone who have few superiors that humility may be inculcated with benefit. The lowest, the poorest, the most ignorant, are sometimes, strange to say, the proudest. They easily take offence; they readily give offence. They soon forget a kindness; they never forgive a wrong. They love not him that rebuketh them; they would rather rebuke others. All this comes of pride. All this is contrary to humility. But although the Apostle is careful, and very justly

¹ Eph. v., 9.² 1 Tim. vi., 15.³ Phil. ii., 11.

so, to inculcate on all the obligations of humility, yet does he here seem to address his exhortation more exclusively to the afflicted, to those who, whether formerly rich or always poor, are now in any trouble. He exhorts these sorrowing persons to "humble themselves under the mighty hand of God,"—"to cast all their care upon God,"—"to be sober and vigilant" and "stedfast in the faith." And he tells them, by way of encouragement, that, if they are thus minded, God will give them grace, "exalt them in due time," care for them, "make them perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle them." And, by way of warning, he admonishes them, that "God resisteth the proud," and that "the devil walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

This word of exhortation may be turned to very profitable account in a Christian family. And first, all may receive it with benefit, if they will receive it with meekness. Those who hold the highest place in a family are equally included in the exhortation with those who hold the lowest. As being themselves no more than servants, even in their more exalted worldly position, of the lowly Saviour,—as sinners, and perchance, great sinners,—they have good reason to make allowance for the faults of those that are under them, and may well afford to show them, on occasions, without appearing lenient or condescending over much, a moderate grant of favour and indulgence. And those who hold a lower place are bound, as Christians, to make certain concessions,—to give as little provocation as possible,—and to acknowledge that there is some ground for it when really given. These good things will be a result, wherever they appear, of a godly resolution to "cast down," for Christ's sake, "imaginations and every other high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God¹."

It will be an obligation upon all, finally, be their outward rank or relative condition what it may, to humble themselves in time of affliction. There is no dispensation which has so evidently the appearance of being sent to humble pride, be it the pride of impenitence or the pride of prosperity, or any other pride,—as affliction. Superiors are sometimes too self-satisfied, because they have all and abound. Inferiors are sometimes too self-satisfied, because they are at peace with one another. Things temporal have gone on well, and then, as too often happens, things spiritual go on ill. Affliction, however, is sent

¹ 2 Cor. x., 5.

to set all this right; and whenever it is sent, be it our care, individually and collectively, to "hear the rod, and who hath appointed it',"—to recognize the mighty hand of God in the dispensation,—and, through faith in a crucified Saviour, and with a deep conviction of utter helplessness, to turn to the atonement with all our heart, and flee for adequate refuge to the hope set before us in the Gospel. And surely "the work" of every such dispensation, so taken, "will be peace, and the effect of it, quietness and assurance for ever".

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. *Rom. viii., 18 to 23.*

18 I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *the same* in hope.

21 Because the creature itself also

shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

23 And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body.

A comparison is here drawn by the Apostle, which should be more frequently drawn, than it is, by ourselves, between "the sufferings of this present time," and "the glory which shall be revealed in us;" and he argues most justly, that they "are not worthy to be compared" the one with the other. How seldom is this thought of when "the sufferings of this present time" press hard upon us, and "are like a sore burden, too heavy for us to bear". Then do we repine, and murmur, and fret, and find fault unceasingly, as though we had deserved nothing, and were used most hardly. Then do we rail at fortune, "darken counsel by words without knowledge," and almost quarrel with God. Then do we bitterly inquire, without at all referring to the real cause of the disquietude, how can all these things be? Whence has arisen this overwhelming desolation? Where shall we flee for help? How shall we retrieve ourselves? When shall we be comforted?

But why, I would answer, do "the sufferings of this present

¹ Micah vi., 9.

² Ps. xxxviii., 4.

³ Isai. xxxii., 7.

⁴ Job xxxviii., 2.

time" assume so very fearful an aspect? They are not in themselves intolerable evils, they are not of necessity permanent evils. They are certainly grievous, but they are presently profitable. They are assuredly burdensome, but they are eventually not too heavy to bear. The real truth is, that our hardened hearts make us so much in love with sin, that we cannot part with it, even for a season, without regret. The world is our god and idol, worldly things are our treasures, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life¹," are our highest objects of interest; and hence, when these are altogether wrested from us, or for a season put out of our sight, nothing seems so grievous. The chief joy is, to all appearance—gone, the great satisfaction of life lost—the chief friend and solace fled. We mourn heavily and will not be comforted; we turn to our former refuge, and find no peace.

But in the midst of all this multitude of troubles, grace springs up, and strengthens the hands, and lightens the heart. A gracious and omnipotent influence entirely changes the purpose, and awakens the spirit; and it is soon seen that "the sufferings of this present time" have come from God, and that he has sent them to reclaim a sinner or try a servant, and that one or other of these purposes is always the end of suffering, and that now is the time to repent and amend, now the time to endure and overcome. How frivolous and valueless does the world then appear—how weak and contemptible the flesh—how completely sunk into insignificance all the things once prized and coveted! Sin becomes identified with suffering—judgment and eternity rear their awful forms amid the ruins of former pleasures—labour for the world is felt to be labour lost; and while the heart is thus musing over its sufferings and the sources of its sufferings, a gracious and merciful Saviour rends the vail in twain which interposes between God and the soul, and offers his highest hopes and sweetest promises to him who has wandered from the fold. *Then*, in particular, do "the sufferings of this present time" begin to appear joyous; peace seems to follow in their train; righteousness to be their first and fairest work; glory their great and good reward.

How readily does the soul, smarting under a sense of sin, fearful of judgment, hopeful in a Saviour, longing for the grace of God, admit the force of the Apostle's declaration, and with him freely acknowledge, that "the sufferings of this present time

¹ 1 John ii. 16.

are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." And although the glory is yet far off, and "the sufferings of this present time" may come again,—although the creature must still occasionally "groan, being burdened¹," and wait for the future "manifestation of the sons of God,"—although there must ever be an "earnest expectation," ever a "bondage of corruption,"—still must "the glory which shall be revealed in us" and "the glorious liberty of the children of God," be, when it comes, a most sufficient counterbalance for all.

How very profitable, then, may this doctrine be made to us. Sufferings, most probably, we have had already. Did they awaken us, if sleeping—strengthen us, if wavering—prove us, if faithful? And now that they are gone, do they continue to bring forth in us the fruits, of which, in the day of visitation, they had so plentifully and seasonably sown the seed? Sufferings doubtless we shall have again. Will they find us wiser, humbler, holier, on account of those we have had already,—or fruitful only in promises, and fruitful in nothing else? Sufferings perchance some of us may even now experience. Does "the glory which shall be revealed in us" hereafter, if we can only continue faithful unto the end, tend to sanctify those sufferings—lighten them—turn them both to profitable and permanent account? Or does "the glory which shall be revealed in us," through our weak faith or hardened hearts, seem unequal to the task of working in our souls, "the peaceable fruit of righteousness²"? Has such been the effect of past, shall such be the effect of present and future sufferings?

In order to bring ourselves into a right way of thinking upon this subject, let us now ponder long upon the excellency of "the glory which shall be revealed in us," a glory which may well quicken our slow faith and sinking spirits; for, although unseen, it is not uncertain. It is a glory which at present is enveloped in mystery and waits at a distance, but it has been assured to us beyond a doubt by the blood, the righteousness, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And of what little consequence will any present sufferings hereafter appear, how will they fall into insignificance as sufferings, and rise into importance as means of grace, as means of making us meet, through faith, for salvation, when "the glory which shall be revealed in us" is that on which we have set our affections, and has actually come.

May Jesus, who, "for the joy that was set before him,

¹ 2 Cor. v., 4.

² Heb. xii., 11.

endured the cross, despising the shame¹,” and the Spirit which now worketh in the souls of the afflicted, and worketh in them still, even after the affliction has come to an end, “after that we have suffered a while,” most effectually “stablish, strengthen, settle us²,” and “as the sufferings of Christ have abounded in us,” so eventually make our consolation also to abound by Christ³.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. 1 St. Peter iii., 8 to 15.

8 *Be ye* all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, *be* pitiful, *be* courteous:

9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

10 For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile;

11 Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.

12 For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord *is* against them that do evil.

13 And who *is* he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

14 But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy *are ye*: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.

In this portion of Scripture promises and precepts are so mercifully blended, that we cannot fail, unless very hardened and far gone from original righteousness, to derive much encouragement from it. And herein is the Gospel, as a whole, to be most mainly distinguished from the Law, inasmuch as it gives much more prominence, at all times, to those attributes of God which constrain the affections, than to those which awaken the fears of the sinner. In the Law there is much to perplex and terrify, in the Gospel much to persuade and attract; and at the same time the Gospel, if it fails in its power to “draw with the bands of love⁴,” can have recourse to its mightiest engine, the wrath of an avenging God. And it is also worthy of remark, that the Gospel gives especial prominence and sanction to all the mild and kindly virtues, promotes love between man and man, and makes the disciples of Jesus happy as well as holy. We find, within the short compass of the passage under consideration,

¹ Heb. xii., 2.² 2 Cor. i., 5.³ 1 Pet. v., 10.⁴ Hos. xi., 4.

several of the mild motives and social obligations enumerated which distinguish our common Christianity, and raise it, for originality as well as beauty, far above any religion that ever existed in the world.

It is now time to make a practical application of some of the peculiar doctrines, which the Church has this day chosen for our special consideration. And first, we are told to "be of one mind," to "have compassion one of another," to "love as brethren," to "be pitiful and courteous," "not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing; knowing that we are hereunto called, that we should inherit a blessing." How happy would the Christian world be, if all were of one mind, and loved as brethren; if tender mercies were always abundant, and injuries always forgiven! And these sweet precepts are followed by such an engaging promise, "ye are hereunto called that ye should inherit a blessing," inherit, (because purchased for you,) forgiveness, mercy, and love in the mansions of heaven. Who would not be constrained by "the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man¹," (evinced in his assignment to him of the inheritance of eternal life,) to follow peace with all men? And who would not experience his own greater happiness in contributing to the greater happiness of others, and find that even in "not returning evil for evil," he might bring about a ministration to blessing?

Further, we are told to "refrain our tongue from evil, and our lips that they speak no guile;" to "eschew evil and do good;" to "seek peace and ensue it." And to these delightful duties are annexed, the pleasant promises of comfort and enjoyment in life, and favour and furtherance from God. We shall have good reason to love life,—we shall see good, prosperous, happy days,—and, above all, receive answers to our prayers,—protection at all times,—and every other good and perfect gift of God,—if our faith in him, through Christ, is thus fruitful in ways of pleasantness. Here again then do the joyful and pleasant privileges of the Gospel take their prominent place among its motives, and allure with most godly enticements all men, yea, even those among us who are in love with sin, to the path of faith and the way of truth.

But finally, we are told to be "followers of that which is good," even if harm should arise, which is not likely. Harm shall scarcely follow, he seems to intimate, if we "be followers of

¹ Tit. iii., 4.

that which is good." Thus is the godly and glorious service of doing good most meetly rewarded on earth with an exemption from all bodily and spiritual harm. And why? Because the Lord himself is the exceeding great reward of him who loves him, and he only who loves the Lord obtains his protection. It is of the Lord alone that the power or the will to work good, the means or the methods of escaping from harm, come. And thus his presence within the soul, strengthening it against all temptation, his presence without the body, protecting it from all danger, shall in general be the assured blessing of every "follower of good." The Apostle further fortifies the people of God with the assurance, that even if harm did follow from all this exercise of good, and an evil world should most unnaturally return evil for all the good it received, still there would be an inward joy and happiness in the good man's soul, and a consciousness that "in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God," he has been enabled to "have his conversation in the world¹."

We, the members of a family, are under a strong obligation to take specially to ourselves, as such, all this wholesome teaching and kindly doctrine. How blessed a thing will it be for us, even on the ground of passing our lives more happily, but much more on the consideration of doing the will of God, if we can only be persuaded to be "all of one mind," to "love as brethren," "not to render evil for evil," to "refrain the tongue from evil," to "seek peace," to "do good"? "Who is he that will harm us," in any sense, if we will only be thus minded? "Blessed shall we be in the city; blessed shall we be in the field; blessed shall we be in our goings out; and blessed shall we be in our comings in²;" but, above all, blessed shall we be in the abundance of our spiritual gifts, in answers to prayer, in supports under temptation, in increase with all the increase of God!

¹ 2 Cor. i., 12.

² Deut. xxviii., 3, 6.

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. *Rom. vi., 3 to 11.*

3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

7 For he that is dead is freed from sin.

8 Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:

9 Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.

10 For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The minister informs godfathers and godmothers, at the close of the Baptismal Service, that "baptism doth represent unto us our profession, which is, to follow the example of our Saviour Christ and to be made like unto him, that as he died and rose again for us, so should we who are baptized die from sin and rise again unto righteousness, continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living." This liturgical explanation of the nature and effects of baptism is a very accurate definition of it, and corresponds most closely with the purport of those scriptural metaphors, which come under our consideration this evening.

The Apostle declares baptism, in its practical character, to be a sort of figurative representation of the death and resurrection of Christ, implying on the part of the baptized person death or deadness unto sin, and life or a new walk unto righteousness. Christ died and rose again in the natural and literal sense. The baptized disciple of Christ undertakes to die and rise again in the figurative and spiritual. "He that is dead is freed from sin." Servitude, whether actual or moral, always ceases with death; and hence is there a most strict obligation imposed upon the baptized Christian, to become by baptism as completely free from the slavery of sin, as he would by death, if a slave, from the power of a master. And further, Christ died and was buried. So must sin, as effectually, be put out of sight, kept

under, not suffered to rise again. And, once more, it is said, that "the old man must be crucified," and "the body of sin destroyed." This implies the obligation, under which a baptized person stands, to abandon sin of every sort, sin in every form, sin under every modification. It implies (to follow up the figure), not dismemberment only, not the mere cutting off of one sin and the retention of every other, not even the cutting off of nearly every sin and the retention of one only, but total renunciation, complete abandonment, final relinquishment, through grace, of all corrupt affections whatsoever, and unchanging perseverance in that "new and living way" which alone leads unto life. This latter blessed feature in the baptismal engagement is most aptly represented to us, further, in the striking figure of Christ's resurrection from the dead. In Christ there was literally, first death, then resurrection. In every baptized disciple of Christ there is implied, first, spiritual death unto sin, then, spiritual life unto righteousness, life in the sense of a new life and a holy life, a walk of faith, a conversation in heaven, a daily addition of "virtue to faith, of knowledge to virtue, of temperance to knowledge, of patience to temperance, of godliness to patience, of brotherly-kindness to godliness, of charity to brotherly-kindness¹." Finally, Christ died for sin once, and never died again. This of course signifies the necessity under which the baptized person lies, of persevering in a way of holiness and never relapsing from it, of going on for ever in a work of faith and labour of love; and, as Christ died but once and his disciples can be baptized but once, so changing once for all "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God²." All these figures by which "baptism is made to represent unto us our profession," place in the strongest point of view possible the strictness, the multiplicity, and the perpetuity of our obligations as Christians.

Dying in baptism unto sin, and living in baptism unto righteousness, freed in a baptismal sense from all sin, buried after the manner of spiritual burial, vowing in the promise to destroy the body of sin, the destruction of sin altogether, and pledged before God to die to sin but once, how strongly do we seem constrained, in the spirit of these striking figures, to become, what we ought to be already, "perfect and complete in all the will of God³." Brethren by baptism and so brethren by baptismal obligation, we possess, in common with our fellow-believers around us, a reli-

¹ 2 Pet. i., 5, 6, 7.² Acts xxvi., 18.³ Col. iv., 12.

gious bond of union. "We, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another¹."

And we, who are here assembled, possess amongst ourselves another bond of union, quite as binding, but not so spiritual as this, namely, that of men who eat of the same bread and drink of the same cup. And thus being both in a spiritual and temporal sense brethren, we are urged by a twofold motive, as brethren, to dwell together in unity. "There is one body and one spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all²." And thus should we be moved to "walk more worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called³," and "endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace⁴." But we are not only brethren one of another, but disciples of one Master, even Christ; children of one Father, even God. Having entered, by baptism, into this covenant; having formed, by baptism, this connection; having undertaken, by baptism, this service; we must so, by God's grace, shape our faith, regulate our life, and adorn our holy vocation, as to please him whom we profess to serve in all things. And we may be assured of this, that unless we "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and make all other things subservient to the one thing needful, no other good thing will be added unto us⁵. We shall not have the power, unless thus rooted and grounded in Christ, to do any thing well, to think any thing of ourselves; and we shall be without that which can alone cement "the bond of peace," "the unity of the Spirit."

The main point, then, for each to think of, is, how does he stand with God? How is his soul affected toward spiritual things? Has the foundation been laid, "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ⁶"? Has that been done, or is it only now doing, which is implied in the words, death, destruction, crucifixion, burial? And is there any sign of spiritual life, of lively faith, of active piety, of newness of character, of growth in grace? Is there any demonstration of sacrifices made, self-denials imposed, mortifications commenced, trials undergone, temptations resisted for Christ's sake and the Gospel's? In a word, is the baptismal vow performed? Is the

¹ Rom. xii., 5.

⁴ Eph. iv., 3.

² Eph. iv., 4.

³ Matt. vi., 33.

⁵ Eph. iv., 1.

⁶ Acts xx., 21.

covenant with God fulfilled? Let these questions be solemnly asked, and our own hearts will return the answer.

And may a quickening Spirit give us all grace to solve the hidden mystery, and arrive at a right conclusion! May he enable us to prosecute the inquiry with faithfulness, and to profit by the result, be it joyous or grievous! And may his power, working in us, obtain so complete a mastery over all our wills and affections, as to turn them whithersoever he will—bring to good effect whatsoever has been well begun—plant in the likeness of Christ's death what at present bears no resemblance to it—and create in the soul that new life, which shall be fashioned like unto his resurrection. And there is the promise of endless life in the realms of bliss, that last great instance of man's conformity to a risen and glorified Saviour, to encourage and cheer him in his heavenward course. "He shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working, whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself¹."

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. *Rom. vi.*, 19 to the end.

19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

20 For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.

21 What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In order to give the fullest force to his argument, the Apostle here makes use of an illustration most familiar to his Roman hearers, and indeed to the inhabitants of any civilized country, namely, an illustration derived from domestic life. In the verses preceding those which have just been recited, he had for the first time in this epistle introduced the illustration in question, and, after the example of his Divine Master, employs it in the service of God. The illustration is that of master and servant,

¹ Phil. iii., 21.

one of the simplest as well as earliest relations that ever existed. In this description of covenant, obedience and authority are always among the implied conditions, and so essential are such conditions held to be to the due fulfilment of the covenant, that the Apostle most naturally asks, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?" And thus he shows, that actual and not apparent authority, actual and not apparent obedience, constitute the true character of the relation in question, and that no man can be the servant of two masters, or in reality, of any but of him whom he obeys. And then he proceeds to say: "I speak after the manner of men, because of the infirmity of your flesh;" I make use of an argument of this kind, because it appeals to your own knowledge and experience, and is rendered necessary by those infirmities of your fleshly nature, which too frequently get the better of other arguments, and will only yield to those which are weighty and powerful.

Let us now see how the Apostle applies the argument. He had been pointing out the necessity of fulfilling the baptismal obligation. He had been pointing out the true nature of Christian discipleship. He had been showing how men, who were admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion, ought to walk and to please God,—what fleshly lusts they should crucify,—what worldly preferences they should overcome. And then, in order to impress these arguments upon their minds in a still more cogent and striking manner, he refers them to what must often have come under their observation, the relation of master and servant, and from their knowledge of that relation convinces them, that authority and obedience must be reciprocal.

And of this he brings forward a proof, in the case of those very converts whom he addresses. "Ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity." In times past, when ye were under the dominion of sin, ye submitted yourselves to its authority without hesitation—ye obeyed all its ungodly impulses—ye followed all its corrupt dictates; and so, being free from righteousness—free from the dominion of any other or better principle—any higher or more spiritual influence—ye proved yourselves to be, in very truth, by your works, the servants of sin. But now the case is altered. Ye have now professedly entered the service of another Master; ye have now by baptism renounced all former engagements; and ye must now consequently do the work and perform the bidding of him,

who hath "called you out of darkness into his marvellous light¹," with quite as much zeal and diligence as you evinced in the service of iniquity. "As ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness." And then, with the view of encouraging these new converts in their difficult undertaking, he points out to them in the most plain and straightforward manner the terrible wages of the one service, and the unspeakable gift of the other. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Let us who are assembled for worship this evening, make an application to ourselves of this wholesome doctrine, even as the Apostle applies it, and the Church would have it applied; and receive the instruction with attention. The first and prominent truth to be noticed is, that there is no middle course in religion. Every disciple of Christ, every man living, is comprised in one of two classes. He is either a servant of sin, or a servant of God. He may be more or less hardened in sin, or more or less confirmed in faith, a longer or a shorter time living in iniquity, or a longer or a shorter time living unto God; but still he can only be placed, according to the definition of Scripture, in one of two classes. Even if he is not quite so lost to all sense of decency, not quite so sunk in trespasses and sins, not quite so devoted to the pleasures of the world as another man, still, if the love of God does not reign paramount in him, sin really possesses his affections and rules him in secret. And so among the servants of God, if some men hold the first place, others the second, and others again the third, they may still, notwithstanding, be agreed in the one main principle of serving God, and so if really thus agreed, be all, however differing in degrees of perfectness, comprehended in the family of God.

There is another consideration, which, for practical purposes, is worthy of notice. The servant of sin is unreservedly its servant. There is nothing that he does which is not contaminated with it, nothing that he does which is acceptable with God. And hence does it fairly follow, on like principles of reasoning, that the true servant of God must be unreservedly his servant, allow himself in nothing that savours of sin or conduces to sin, "do nothing against the truth, but for the truth²," and "lay

¹ 1 Pet. ii., 9.

² 2 Cor. xiii., 8.

aside every weight and the sin that doth most easily beset him, and run with patience the race that is set before him¹."

And finally it is especially to be noted, that the ordinary servant does not more fairly earn or more surely receive his wages, than does the sinner earn and receive the wages of sin. "The wages of sin is death," and those wages he receives. Death is his portion—the second death—the death which succeeds the judgment—the death worse than annihilation—the death which is the eternal destruction, both of soul and body, in hell. But the portion of the servant of God, however zealous he may be, is not wages, but a gift. It is not a thing won, a thing earned, a thing deserved, but a thing given. Holiness is a gift, not a debt. Everlasting life is a gift, not a debt. God is the giver through Christ; man is the receiver by the grace of God. In a word, there being but two classes, let us take no middle course; there being no partial adoption of religion, let us surrender ourselves up altogether to that which is alone pure and undefiled; there being only life and death, let us choose life.

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. *Rom. viii., 12 to 17.*

12 Brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but

ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.

The privileges and duties of a Christian are here set forth in the plainest and strongest manner. And they are proved in this Scripture to be inseparable the one from the other. The privileges involve the duties, and the duties the privileges. Neither will avail without the other. The privileges comprehend the motives, the means, and the end of our faith. And the duties, thus furnished with edifying appliances, are the result of a good use of the privileges already received, and a qualification for

¹ Heb. xii., 1.

more. And so on the other hand, although it is seldom so considered, does an omission of the duties involve a loss of the privileges. Even a stated performance of the duties, if the performance be feeble and languid, will often in time be followed by a gradual withdrawal of the privileges. And yet must it never be imagined, that, although the duties and privileges are inseparable, the one can ever earn the other. On the contrary, the privileges are freely given, gratuitously made over through the atoning blood of Christ, to those and those only, who "by patient continuance in well doing," and that not of themselves but by the gift of God, "seek for glory, and honour, and immortality¹."

This notion of the inseparable connexion between duties and privileges, is represented to us in the form of a figure. God appears in the character of a Father, who, upon certain conditions not to be departed from, bequeaths an inheritance of value to all his adopted children. Be it, however, noted, that the inheritance in question is not described as a portion of younger sons, which a parent may confer or withhold at pleasure, but as a heritage necessarily and regularly descending to so many first-born, to which they may plead, if they do not forfeit the conditions, a title indisputable, and keep it, once they obtain possession, for ever. The Father who bequeaths this inheritance of value, is God, our heavenly Father; the inheritance of value is eternal life; the instrumentality through which it is bequeathed is the atoning blood of Christ; the heirs who obtain possession of it are all God's adopted children; the possession itself is everlasting and ample; the conditions of obtaining it are a mortification of the deeds of the body, a surrender of the whole spirit, soul and body, to the guidance of the Spirit, a heart full of filial confidence in God, a spiritually-engrafted conviction of adoption into his family, and a readiness to undergo the chastisement, already undergone by Christ, of sons and daughters of God.

Thus, then, do we obtain an outline, through a most pleasant and familiar figure, of the coordinate character of the Christian's duties and privileges. His privileges are a present adoption, and an eternal inheritance; the one through the Spirit, the other through God's only begotten Son. And his duties are faith, self-denial, obedience, filial confidence, filial love, and filial patience under discipline. Not being under any obligation

¹ Rom. ii., 7.

whatsoever to "live after the flesh," but being under so many and such peculiar obligations to live after the Spirit, be it the high and sole aim of every one of us to have respect unto the recompense of the inheritance provided for us. "Let us set our affections on things above¹," have our conversation in that heaven from whence we look for the Saviour, look steadily unto "Jesus, the Author as well as Finisher of our faith," and desire nothing so much on earth as to be led, adopted, borne witness to by the Spirit of God. And being constrained by these considerations, let us set the due value on our glorious and heavenly birthright, by fulfilling its conditions.

And how shall we properly ascertain, and on the best authority, and by the surest test, whether we are really doing this? By examining ourselves daily, by trying ourselves continually, whether the character of children of God by adoption really does belong to us—positively may be affirmed of us—faithfully is, at this present time, exemplified in us. And be it our special care to remember, that upon this inquiry necessarily must depend, both a knowledge of our state at present, and its sufficient spiritual regulation for the time to come.

The subjects of inquiry are already provided, the tests of adoption already set down for us by the Apostle; and we can ask ourselves solemnly, in secret, and at leisure, whether we actually do "mortify the deeds of the body," whether we actually do suffer with and after the example of Christ, whether, in all our words, deeds, and thoughts, we are "led by the Spirit of God," and possess his inward testimony, and cry unto God through him, not "in the spirit of bondage," but in "the spirit of adoption," "Abba, Father." And let the chief constraint to an immediate and constantly recurring self-examination on these serious subjects be, that upon them most certainly rests the attainment of any spiritual privileges. And let us also be constrained by the alternative presented to us by the Apostle: "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

¹ Col. iii., 2.

THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. 1 Cor. x., 1 to 13.

BRETHREN, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat;

4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

5 But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

6 Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

7 Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

8 Neither let us commit forni-

cation, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. .

9 Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.

10 Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

11 Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.

13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

The Apostle here proves by example that punishment always follows sin, that sin, more especially, which is committed after men have received the knowledge of the truth, and obtained access to the means of grace. He tells us, that, although the children of Israel were "under the cloud¹," and "passed through the sea²," and did "eat the same spiritual meat³," and did "drink the same spiritual drink⁴," and so had abundant opportunity of glorifying the governing power and recognising the directing hand of Providence, yet "with many of them God was not well pleased, but overthrew them in the wilderness."

The first example of this kind that the Apostle adduces, is the example of lust punished. The Israelites lusted after quails when they had the manna, and God punished them for this, by sending pestilential diseases among them, and slaying, even while the meat was yet in their mouths, the mightiest of their families⁵. The next example adduced is that of idolatry

¹ Exod. xiii., 21. ² Exod. xiv., 22. ³ Exod. xvi., 15.

⁴ Exod. xvii., 6. ⁵ Ps. lxxviii., 30, 31.

punished. "The people sat down to eat and to drink" in honour of the golden calf, "and rose up to play" and dance in token of its supposed divinity; and three thousand of the idolaters were slain. Another example adduced is that of fornication punished. "Some of them committed fornication, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand¹." And a further example adduced is that of temptation of Christ punished. "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents²." And the last example adduced is that of impatience under trial punished. "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer⁴."

Here, then, we have well authenticated instances of sins visited with God's temporal vengeance, and of sinners not permitted to live, who had grievously transgressed the Lord's commandments. We have instances of lust, idolatry, fornication, unbelief, impatience under trial most signally punished, and must acknowledge, with shame and confusion of face, that some of these sins are, even among Christians, not uncommon, and deserve to be visited, in the more aggravated cases of transgressors under the Gospel, with at least ten-fold wrath and vengeance. The facts in question are striking proofs, that God sometimes awards his punishments even in this world, and perchance visits most crying sins with the two-fold retribution of death here, and death for ever.

The Church in the wilderness is a warning, in all these particulars, to the Church in general. "These things," saith the Apostle emphatically, "were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted." "All these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." With us it sometimes happens, that "the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things entering in choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful³." The Israelites, who "were under the cloud and passed through the sea," did, notwithstanding such signal tokens of God's presence and favour, "lust after evil things." So, I fear, do we, who have greater knowledge, higher motives, nobler privileges. The world, the flesh, and the devil, still tempt us to lust after them. We covet what others possess; we covet what we cannot obtain; we covet what we must soon part with; and the means

¹ Exod. xxxii., 6—19. ² Numb. xxv., 1—9. ³ Numb. xxi., 6.

⁴ Numb. xiv., 2, 29, 37. ⁵ Matt. xiii., 22.

of grace, with which we are blessed, do not always appear sufficient to keep down effectually our spirit of covetousness.

Learning from this punishment of the Israelites that lust or covetousness (for it is the same thing) is hateful to God, let us take heed to our ways herein, and be warned by the terrors of the Lord, if we will not be moved by his love, that "every one that nameth the name of Christ must depart from iniquity¹." Idolatry also, not merely the idolatry of image worship, but of preference of some sinful object of desire, is here seen to be hateful to God. A simple and fervent faith in our Lord Jesus Christ will love and adore him alone who died for all, and will not admit into the sacred home of its affections any other principle whatsoever. Even one earthly thing thus idolized is a virtual dethronement of the Lord Jesus Christ; and surely if this Scripture be true, must bring with it swift destruction. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all²;" for "sin (even in one point) is the transgression of the law³," and "no idolater (whosoever he be) hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God⁴." And is not unbelief also a sin in this our day? And is not impatience under trial a stone of stumbling and rock of offence to many unstable souls? Yea, even though we be every one of us professors of Christ's religion and hearers of his ministers, there is necessity imposed upon us, "seeing that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things⁵," to "take heed, lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God⁶."

The Apostle, having thus proved by example, that punishment always follows sin, and having also, I trust, "written these things for our special admonition," proceeds to give encouragement to those, who in the midst of great and sore temptations are anxiously taking heed unto themselves, lest they fall. And his encouragement is first, that "no temptation has taken them but such as is common to men," and secondly, that "God is faithful," who, far from suffering them "to be tempted above that they are able, will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it."

What encouragements these are to weary and heavy-laden sinners, who really have put on, in humble confidence, the Lord Jesus Christ, and are, at present, "in heaviness through mani-

¹ 2 Tim. ii., 19.

² James ii., 10.

³ 1 John iii., 4.

⁴ Eph. v., 5.

⁵ Rom. ii., 2.

⁶ Heb. iii., 12.

fold temptations." If, in the examples of sinners of old time perishing in their sin, careless, impenitent sinners of the present day are solemnly warned; so much the more in these comforting assurances of a Father of mercies and God of all comfort, will Christ's approved servants obtain strength in time of temptation, and "find grace to help them in their time of need¹." If those who are "drawn away of their own lust and enticed²," receive terrible admonition, so do those who endure temptation find infinite joy and comfort. They are greatly encouraged by the assurance, that their measure of temptation has not been greater than that of other disciples of Christ, nor greater than what, with the assistance of the doctrines and promises of the Gospel, all may bear. And they are also encouraged with the assurance, that God will never suffer them to be tempted above their strength, and in any case provide, through the agency of his mighty power, the means of deliverance.

Thus warned on the one hand, and encouraged on the other, let us all, according to our several spiritual exigencies, profit by this evening's admonitions. And let us especially guard against that indifference to edifying truths, here and elsewhere taught, to which so many of us are prone, and with which, unless we are especially careful, the tempter may even now tempt us, and deaden the efficacy of that "engrafted word which is able to save the soul³."

THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. 1 Cor. xii., 1 to 11.

CONCERNING spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.

2 Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.

3 Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

9 To another faith by the same

¹ Heb. iv., 16.

² James i., 14.

³ James i., 21.

Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another *divers* kinds of tongues;

to another the interpretation of tongues:

11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

These words were originally intended to bear reference to the spiritual gifts which had been distributed in great profusion, but with remarkable wisdom, among the members of the primitive Church. The spiritual gifts of which the Apostle is speaking, are evidently those of a miraculous and extraordinary kind, well fitted for the peculiar times in which the first Christians lived, and well calculated to illustrate, in their several operations and diversities, the true character of that promised descent of the Holy Ghost, of which they were such striking evidences. Ecclesiastical history records, that they prevailed a long time in the Church, and had not altogether ceased, according to some writers, even towards the close of the fourth century¹. As soon, however, as the wisdom of God had founded his Church, on that established and immovable basis against which the gates of hell could not prevail, these extraordinary gifts of the Spirit began gradually to diminish; and at last the enlargement of the Church in boundary and the growth of its members in grace was left to those ordinary methods of inspiration, which began with the beginning of Christianity and will continue to the end of the world.

Three truths of importance, with reference to these extraordinary gifts, are apparent in this exposition of the Apostle; and they are, first, the source, secondly, the end, and, thirdly, the diversity of their operation. The source of all these extraordinary gifts was the Spirit, the end to which they were directed was that "every man should profit withal," and their diversity was manifold, yet so ordered, that every one had some gift, none all. As these extraordinary gifts of the Spirit have long ceased, and they are apparently now no longer necessary for the more effectual furtherance of the Gospel, their use or abuse cannot of course be brought to bear, either directly or practically, upon the Christian church in the present day. Since, however, they are incontestable proofs, and proofs for ever, of the divine foundation of our holy religion, we should, upon hearing them severally described, bless God for having given us such divine

¹ MOSHEIM'S *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. i., pp. 340, and 341, and note.

manifestations of the truth, and so increase our faith in him, who has dealt so wonderfully with us.

We have already incidentally noticed the ordinary workings of the Holy Spirit. These are still in operation in the Christian church; and to these the force of the Apostle's reasoning is at least as pertinent and applicable, as it was to the miraculous workings of former times. Let us bear in mind then, first, the source of the ordinary gifts of the Spirit. Whatsoever their "diversities" may be, whatsoever their "differences of administration," whatsoever their "diversities of operations," their source is the Spirit. Thence come their properties, their peculiarities, their powers of action. Thence come their goodness, their variety, their continuance. Thence come their strength to support, their ability to resist, their aptitude to overcome. And coming as they do from thence, they come freely, liberally, spontaneously. No man deserves them, few men seek them, all men need them. They are "given to all men liberally," and by one "that upbraideth not." And "every good gift and every perfect gift," thus given, "cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning¹." Thus do the ordinary as well the extraordinary gifts of grace come from one and the same Spirit, as their only and original source.

But so also is the end of both ordinary and extraordinary spiritual influences the same. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." The Christian must do good with his measure of grace, whatsoever it is. He must not let it lie idle, bury it in the earth, keep it under a bushel; much less grieve it, quench it, do despite unto it. Grace is not given to be merely talked about, exhausted in prayer, confined to feelings. It is rather given to be put to a use, exhibited in the daily life, shown in self-denials and victories over besetting sins, evinced abroad, employed at home. As in the exercise of their miraculous powers and endowments, those in the primitive times who were "zealous of spiritual gifts" had to "seek that they might excel to the edifying of the Church²," so must we who live in later times, and are not so highly favoured, turn to a profitable account our measure of heavenly inspiration, let our light, if really shed abroad in our hearts, shine openly before men, show unceasingly "the greatness of Christ's power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power³," and "as

¹ James i., 17.² 1 Cor. xiv., 12.³ Eph. i., 19.

every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God¹."

But again, as in the extraordinary, so also in the ordinary operations of the Spirit, are there "diversities of gifts," and "differences of administrations." Different spiritual diseases require different methods of treatment; and hence the great Physician of souls wisely as well as mercifully adapts his remedies to our necessities, and divides them to every man, severally, as he will. To one he gives faith—to another patience—to another meekness—to another charity. To one he gives a wise and understanding heart—to another a contrite spirit—to another grace to walk circumspectly—to every man some spiritual gift—to every man what he actually needs, and what he may readily place to his soul's account, if he so pleases. Howbeit there is not in every man a knowledge of his necessities, a willingness to have them supplied, a disposition to have recourse to the true and only source of supply, or sufficient faith in that "law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which makes him free from the law of sin and death²." May the Spirit, whose ordinary and extraordinary operations we have been now describing, supply all his necessities in this respect, if such a man be now amongst us. May the particular gift that he needs be speedily given him; may he receive it with meekness; may he put it to the use of edifying; and, in due time and gradual measure, bring forth those fruits of so good a gift, which "are in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth³."

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. 1 Cor. xv., 1 to 11.

BRETHREN, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures;

4 And that he was buried, and

that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures:

5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

¹ 1 Pet. iv., 10.² Rom. viii., 2.³ Eph. v., 9.

9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in

vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

11 Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.

The Apostle here reminds the Corinthians of the principles of their faith, the evidences in its favour, and the agency through which they had received it. He tells them, that the death and resurrection of Christ had been distinctly foretold in the Old Scriptures, and that his resurrection from the dead, according to the Scriptures, had been attested by Peter¹, James, all the apostles², five hundred of the brethren, and himself³, all of whom had seen him, many of whom were living. He tells them, that this doctrine had been always preached to them as a necessary and primary article of their faith; and that it had been always so set forth by himself and the rest of the apostles.

But whence had arisen this necessity of recapitulating doctrines, which had not only been preached by the apostles, but received by the Corinthians? Unfortunately their faith had been shaken and their principles corrupted. At first they received gladly what the apostles preached boldly. But seducers and deceivers, agents of Satan and of unrighteousness, had crept in unawares, and by their "profane and vain babblings," had most grievously "corrupted them from the simplicity which was in Christ⁴." These men had taught them, by good words and fair speeches, to "turn away their ears from the truth, and to be turned unto fables⁵." They had taught them to err from the faith in matters of importance, yea, even of the very chiefest importance. They had taught them to disbelieve the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead and a future state, which was a doctrine essential to godliness, and necessary to salvation; a doctrine, in fact, on which all their hopes as Christians were fixed, and without which they would be of all men the most miserable.

And why should deceivers and seducers have had such power? How could any arts and devices, fleshly or devilish, have undermined a foundation laid by God, strengthened by his Spirit, built up by his apostles? The servants of Jesus did not

¹ See Luke xxiv., 34.

² Luke xxiv., 50.

³ Acts ix., 4.

⁴ 1 Tim. vi., 20.

⁵ 2 Cor. xi., 30.

⁶ 2 Tim. iv., 4.

neglect these new converts. The Spirit of might still worked wonders in their hearts. "The Gospel of the kingdom" retained many faithful adherents, who showed forth its power in their hearts, by its power in their lives. How could these things be? Whence could the ministers of evil have derived their strength, their influence, their ascendancy? The foundation, in all probability, had not been sufficiently laid, and the truth had not been made to pervade the length, breadth, and depth of the soul. The impression had been definite, but short-lived. The seed had been good, but not the soil. There was belief, but only nominal belief. There was knowledge, but merely partial knowledge. There was a work of the Spirit, but not a fruit of the Spirit. There was a trial of faith, but a failure on the trial. The corruption of the fleshly nature still remained. The propensity of the natural man still rose uppermost. The dark delusion of inbred depravity still blinded the eyes. The will of the flesh rebelled. The pride of the heart regained its vantage ground. The love of the world prevailed. And yet the apostles preached: faithfully and worked effectually. They sowed the seed, and watered it. They laid the foundation, and built upon it. And they were compelled to preach again and work again, or all their labour would have been lost. They were necessitated to sow once more the precious seed, and water it night and day, lest Satan should gain the advantage, and reap his harvest of tares. And of this constraining, overwhelming necessity, the whole of the chapter, which in part is now before us, is a proof and a fruit. It was written to prove to the Corinthians, that the doctrine which they had been tempted to disbelieve, was founded on the strongest evidence, and was itself the foundation of all their hopes. It was written to prove, that the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of man were things not extraordinary, and that as doctrines and facts they stood or fell together.

And do we not need an occasional recapitulation of leading doctrines to refresh our failing memories, quicken our slow perceptions, startle our slumbering faith? And particularly on the subject of the resurrection, do we not often need recapitulation to stir us up by way of remembrance? Yes, indeed, seldom does the resurrection exercise its rightful influence over our thoughts, wills, and affections. Seldom does it enable us to withstand temptation, overcome evil, endure affliction. And ought it not, if it be truly believed? Jesus Christ has triumphed

over death, hell, and sin. He is "the resurrection and the life, and they that believe in him, though they be dead, yet shall they live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in him, shall never die¹." How encouraging is this, to the sinner to sin no more; to the waverer to halt no longer between two opinions; to the easily tempted to shake off the besetting temptation; to the sorrowful to cease from sorrowing; to the weak in the faith to become strong; to the contentious to live in peace! How encouraging is this, in a word, to all who have "received" the Gospel, who "stand" in the Gospel, who would "keep in memory" the Gospel, who would be "saved" by the Gospel, to "hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering," and to have full confidence in him in whom they believe! Let us ever keep full in view this encouragement of a faithfully preached Gospel, and never, on any consideration whatever, suffer its seed to be taken out of our hearts. For encouragement, for atonement, for sanctification, for forgiveness, let us look to a risen Saviour; and make it alike an argument against impenitence, and a motive for continuance in well-doing, that there will be a resurrection from the dead.

We must not pass over, in conclusion, an example which the Apostle here exhibits of great personal humility. He had been alluding to the instrumentality he had had, in common with the rest of the apostles, in bringing about the conversion of those whom he was addressing. This recalls to his recollection his own original blindness and persecution of the Church of God; and with admirable humility and self-abasement he offers an instance, in himself, of the exceeding great power of the Gospel. He deems himself "the least of the apostles:" gives the other apostles their due merit; and disclaims his own. He forgets not, even in his present high position, his former backslidings, for he calls himself "a persecutor of the Church of God." He desires to shun no exertion, no labour in the cause of Christ, which may prove that he is now as diligent in serving as he once was in resisting him. "I laboured more abundantly than they all." And then as if to magnify the grace of God the more, and deprive himself even of the shadow of a pretence for glorying, he adds in the very spirit of self-renunciation, "ye not I, but the grace of God, which was with me."

If the former portion of our meditation was a lesson to backsliders, so is this portion instructive to true Christians.

¹ John xi., 25.

² Heb. x., 23.

Pride is the last natural propensity that leaves the penitent heart, for it is a propensity more deeply rooted in it than any other. And hence if a man has, by the grace of God, attained to a certain degree of proficiency in holiness, he is continually liable to the temptation of "thinking more highly of himself than he ought to think." If any of us be at present in this happy but dangerous position, let us be careful, extremely careful. Let us remember the Apostle's mean opinion of himself. Let us remember our own extreme liability to fall and err, and then pray heartily and ever, that, as by the grace of God we are what we are, so that grace, which has been bestowed upon us, may never, through our own heedlessness or weakness, be in vain.

THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. 2 Cor. iii., 4 to 9.

4 Such trust have we through Christ to God-ward:

5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God:

6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

7 But if the ministration of

death, written *and* engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which *glory* was to be done away:

8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

9 For if the ministration of condemnation *be* glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

The New Testament is the appointed medium through which the minister of Christ derives his function and delivers his message. There, as in a most secure book of archives, are safely deposited his commission—his authority—his official history—his code of instructions; and thence, as from a most valuable register of useful facts and authenticated information, he extracts the knowledge that saves, and the motive that edifies.

Every sermon that is preached, every word pertaining to the soul that is spoken, every religious book that is put into the hand, every conversation that is held on a sacred subject, is or ought to be the minister's transcript of some page of the book of life. And in that book, if faithful to his trust, his word may ever be found. In that book, if unfaithful, he may read his own condemnation. In that book, if his enemies doubt his

authority, may his enemies find it. And never can that book be forgotten, or obliterated, or destroyed. Safe in the keeping of him who indited it, sealed with his own seal, written with his own hand, attested by his own witnesses, it defies the dilapidations of time, and tells its own story for ever.

And never can that book speak error. Its author is the fountain of all light, truth, and wisdom, "in whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning," and from whom nought can come but perfectness. And never has that been taught which this book teaches. Man knows himself to be deserving of wrath. He has ever acknowledged himself to be sinful. But he never could find a way to escape, never do away his sin, never either discover or offer a sufficient propitiation. But this has been revealed in the book of which we speak. There a Divine Being is revealed, who by taking the form of man, and retaining the righteousness of God, has had power to take away the guilt of sin, and present the sinner faultless. In a word, there the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ has been made manifest, "who has abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel¹."

And, once more, it is impossible that this book, rightly regarded and spiritually discerned, can be misunderstood. The things that it concerns man most to know are there revealed with the greatest plainness, and in the greatest simplicity. Some things, indeed, it may be hard to understand; but they are not things necessary to salvation. And of course it is a thing to be expected, that man's finite understanding would be unequal to the task of comprehending all mysteries and all knowledge. And thankful, supremely thankful, should he be that the word of God is a sufficient light unto his feet, and a sufficient lantern unto his path, to guide him to heaven².

But further and secondly, the Epistle tells us that the minister's power of preaching or serving his Master effectually is derived from God. "We are not able of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God." And what a mighty power is this! What an infinite sufficiency is this! What a sacred treasury of things new and old, holy desires, good counsels, saving truths, is here enshrined! The Holy Spirit cannot deceive, cannot err, cannot fall short. He is merciful, loving, and righteous; holy, just, and good. He is peace to the pious, terror to the wicked, comfort to the sorrow-

¹ 2 Tim. i., 10.

² Ps. cxix., 105.

ing. He teaches the ignorant, guides the weak, softens the hardened. He adapts himself to all times, all persons, all circumstances; strengthening as strength is needed, and proportioning larger measures of help to more urgent seasons of need. He works with us and in us, for us and without us, not waiting till we ask, to grant, not granting what we ask at once; striving with us against our will, giving us the will as well as the power, and never leaving us altogether, until we have definitively shaken off all restraint, and resolved, in defiance of long-pleading grace and long-suffering patience, to exhaust all the mercy of God.

And how great is the power of this Holy Spirit over a hardened heart, changing it, even if it be like a flint, to softness and compliance, and turning it, obstinately as it resists all human importunity, whithersoever it will! And how great is the power of this Holy Spirit to befriend and support each tempted soul that is faithful to God, lifting up its strong hand and mighty arm against the most formidable of all enemies, and resisting and overcoming the malice of the devil, and the cunning of the world, with strength and succour irresistible. Moreover, also, this Holy Spirit opens our understanding, that we may understand the Scripture, when we read it, hear it, expound it, meditate upon it; showing us what is good, and what the Lord doth require of us—opening our hearts as well as our understandings—feeding us with milk or meat as we are babes or men—keeping us from all error—and “guiding us into all truth¹.”

Such, then, is the help which our ministers have, such the words which our ministers speak. Their help is the help of God; their words are the words of God. It is not human wisdom which thinks, or human ability which writes. The preacher is Christ’s ambassador, Christ’s representative. Christ has bequeathed to the faithful preacher his New Testament, and Christ makes him its able minister.

And living as we do under so glorious a ministration,—a ministration of the Spirit,—a ministration of righteousness that does such great things for us,—and exceeds in glory not only all man’s contrivances, but even every former ministration of God himself,—how entirely must it be our own faults if we are not growing in grace! In the ministration committed to our ministers, it is not man that speaks, but God; God that cannot lie; man with the voice of God. We are mightily helped, if we do as

¹ John xvi., 13.

mightily strive. We have strength on our side that can overcome any enemy, if we will only work with it, and overcome with it, and not suffer ourselves to be overcome by the least temptation, the weakest opponent. We have a minister ever ready, ever willing, to warn us of danger, if we will only heed him, only watch with him. We have a faithful word which our minister preaches, a word "sharper than any two-edged sword," and penetrating even to our very inmost souls¹; and that word is truth, unalterable truth. That word will be fulfilled in its season, "whether we hear, or whether we forbear²." The sentence it now passes will be passed hereafter, as surely as the promises it now makes will be fulfilled. And shall the minister preach, and the word warn, and the Spirit work, and that from the youth up until now, and from the time now present to the hour of death, and the people still be regardless, still unfruitful, still unthankful? Shall Christ have died for sin, and find no sinner that repents? Shall Christ have risen from the dead, and find few that will rise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness? Shall Christ have ascended into heaven, and find few that will "set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth³?" Oh, where is the faith, the zeal, the love, the diligence of former times, when Christ was all and in all, and they that "believed in him were together, and had all things common⁴," and for his sake "forsook all covetous desires and inordinate love of riches," and showed by the fruits of a ministration preeminently glorious, that in truth it was "a ministration that exceeded in glory!"

May it henceforth be our greatest ambition, instead of toiling and striving for the praises and profits of a perishing world, (the which, when we think we have attained, we must very soon quit,) rather to toil and strive for the praise of God and the profit of the soul, things that will amply repay the labour, not perish when we perish, and serve us in an everlasting habitation. Let it be our greatest ambition, aided by the ministrations of the word and Spirit and messenger of Christ, to "walk worthy" of that more glorious "vocation wherewith we are called⁵,"—to live and act like new creatures—to bring forth, in our several conditions and callings, the fruits of spiritual change—and to make every occupation and mode of life subservient to the one great end of salvation to the soul. And behold if we

¹ Heb. iv., 12.² Ezek. ii., 5.³ Col. iii., 2.⁴ Acts ii., 44.⁵ Eph. iv., 1.

hesitate or waver, the Lord by his ministering servant still cries out with greater importunity, with more urgent expostulation than ever, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God follow him, but if Baal then follow him¹."

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. *Gal. iii.*, 16 to 22.

16 To Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

17 And this I say, *that* the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

18 For if the inheritance *be* of the law, *it is* no more of promise: but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.

19 Wherefore then *serveth* the law? It was added because of

transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

20 Now a mediator is not a *mediator* of one, but God is one.

21 *Is* the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

The Apostle's argument here is, that the Jews had not that exclusive interest in the promises of God to which they laid claim. Not content with the sole and separate enjoyment for many ages, notwithstanding great backslidings, of God's peculiar favour; not content with the privileges of intercourse with God, signal deliverance from enemies, preservation from idolatry, the glory, the covenants, the promises which they had possessed so long, abused so often, and never deserved, they would have limited God's future and everlasting mercies to themselves alone, and denied them to the rest of mankind. The Messiah, indeed, long promised and long expected, was born among them, within the limits of their land, and of one of their own tribes². He preached, when he entered on his ministry, to them alone, to them pre-eminently³. And when he was about to leave the world, he directed his Apostles to preach, first to them, and afterward to all nations⁴. This was not extraordinary, and was

¹ 1 Kings xviii., 21.

² Compare Matt. i., 2, 16, with Heb. vii., 14. See also Matt. ii., 4, 5, 6, and Micah v., 2.

³ Matt. x., 5, 6; xv. 24.

⁴ Luke xxiv., 47.

indeed natural under the circumstances. "God had not cast away his people¹." They were still dear to him. They were not, however, to keep all favour to themselves, and to keep it for ever, and so the Saviour became, according to the announcement of the angel, the Saviour of all people², and his Gospel was preached indiscriminately to the nations of the earth. And of this universal preaching of the Gospel, we of this land, and of this family, are among the fruits. We are, in the sense of the Apostle, Abraham's seed, united by faith to him in whom all nations are blessed, and so "heirs according to the promise³."

But amongst the many that were converted to Christianity by the preaching of the Apostles were to be found Jews, men who had heretofore lived under the Mosaic dispensation, and might very probably, even after they had embraced Christianity, retain some of the prejudices of their early education. This actually occurred. The Jewish converts, when they became Christians, did not wholly renounce Judaism. They remembered the Mosaic law with reverence, and when (as at first) only partially acquainted with the principles of Christianity, they could scarcely bring themselves to believe that their beloved law was abrogated. This, however, the Apostle proves beyond a doubt in the Epistle for the day, and refers all his Christian readers, whether Jew or Gentile, to "the principles of the doctrine of Christ." He tells them, that "to Abraham and his seed were the promises made," and that to them that believed like Abraham, Abraham's reward would be given, remission of sins that are past, and the hope of eternal life.

Before we arrive at our practical conclusion, let us first bestow a portion of our attention on the Apostle's unanswerable argument. And first, he lays down as the basis of his argument a fact, in which all would agree, that "to Abraham and his seed were the promises made⁴." If then, says he, Christ be this promised seed of Abraham in whom all nations should be blessed, (and this you do not deny,) how can you limit the inheritance of a universal blessing to a few Israelites? How can you make that the condition of obtaining the inheritance, which was not in existence when the promise of the inheritance was given? I do not mean to say, says the Apostle further, that the law in which the Jews make their boast and justly, is on this account to be altogether set aside and discarded; for, on the contrary, it

¹ Rom. xi, 1.

³ Gal. iii, 29.

² Luke ii, 10, 11.

⁴ See Gen. xvii, 7.

is admirably calculated, by inducing a universal sense of sin, to prepare men's minds for an acknowledgment of the truth, and it contains nothing that contradicts the truth. But this I assert, and assert without fear of contradiction, that the observance of the law is not necessary to salvation, first, because it is a covenant made between other parties, and subsequently to the original offer of salvation; further, because it contains no provision for "the remission of sins," which is an essential preliminary to salvation; and finally, because it does not offer or recognise any motive beyond the present life, in a word, does not, as the Apostle says, "give life." Those, then, concludes the Apostle, are the real children of Abraham, the undoubted heirs of the promise, who, although not Israelites, are yet, in the true sense of Abraham's covenant, believers in him who gave the promise. And that, he also concludes, will be the true and only method of obtaining part and lot in an inheritance of the promise, which comes up most closely to the method pursued by Abraham, faith in him who gives the promise, and faith which acts upon its conviction immediately and without hesitation. For such believers, for such faith, there is remission of sins now, and a promise of life hereafter.

We profess ourselves to be of the number of those, in whose favour the promise was made, of the number of those who really believe in him who was promised, and desire to be united to him by faith both here and ever. If this profession is sincere, do we pursue Abraham's method, for that must be the only and true method which in Abraham's case was successful? "Abraham believed in God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness¹." And how did he believe in God? Not by remaining where he was and making no effort to go further, not by simply believing, and paying no heed to the command of him in whom he believed. No; he obeyed at once, when he was called to go out into a place "which he should after receive for an inheritance," and renouncing all the idolatry, all the worldliness, all the iniquity in which he had been brought up, "went out, knowing not whither he went²."

And must we not, if we would be "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise," do likewise? Must we not bestir ourselves, and, not regarding crosses or self-denials or mortifications of pride, go forth on the walk of faith, and take the road to heaven? Must we not, for Christ's sake, declare plainly

¹ Rom. iv., 3.

² Heb. xi., 8.

by our life and conversation, that we "seek a better country" than the present world? Must we not, "renouncing the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh, so that we neither follow nor are led by them¹," show that we "seek a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God²?" Yes, ours must be this working faith, or we shall miss the fulfilment of the promise. We must be substantially believers in Christ, and live like men whose practice resembles their profession. And then, but not till then, will the Saviour blot out all former sins, and finally, but only if the faith which makes a good beginning continues strong, as it was at first, unto the end, cause us to "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," and all the believing people of God, "in the kingdom of heaven³."

It will be a help to those who have not yet attained to this lively belief, as well as to those who have attained to it, but need occasional confirmation, to read from time to time the commandments of the law of Moses. There they will see sin portrayed in its liveliest colours, sin threatened with vengeance, sin brought home to the conscience, "all, in a word, concluded under sin." There they will see a strict rule of duty, which man of himself cannot follow. There they will see the difficulty of obedience, which a Saviour alone can render easy. There they will think of their own insufficiency, and conclude that they need a Saviour. They will conclude that sin is hateful to God, and that none can be clean in his sight. They will conclude that to do all that is commanded well, is not possible with man, and only possible with God. And the result of such conclusions will be, if fairly drawn and faithfully followed, that the sinner will believe, and the believer become confirmed in his belief, the sinner will sin no more, and both, in due season, will inherit the promises.

¹ Baptismal Service.

² Heb. xi., 10.

³ Matt. viii., 11.



THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. *Gal. v., 16 to 24.*

16 I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred,

variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

The Apostle here exhorts the Galatians to "walk in the Spirit," and it is his evident object throughout the whole of the Epistle, to place this obligation before them in the clearest light, and to enforce it in the strongest manner. And this he does, by pointing out, first, as an immediate result of "a walk in the Spirit," a preservation from the tyranny of those carnal lusts, between which and the Spirit there is constant warfare. He then enumerates the several "works of the flesh" which rankle in the soul of fallen man, and assures his brethren the Galatians, that it is impossible for any "who do such things to enter into the kingdom of God." And as if he did not deem even this a sufficiently strong argument to wean men from the lust of the flesh, and to persuade them to "walk in the Spirit," the Apostle describes, further, what the works or fruits of the Spirit are, and with as much fulness and particularity as he had previously described the works of the flesh. And with a view to the still greater encouragement of Christians in so holy a course, he tells them, that the divine law which so unreservedly condemns and denounces sin, is no longer in force with respect to those, who, by the grace of God in Christ Jesus, "walk no longer after the flesh but after the Spirit;" but that on the contrary, this spirituality of mind and walk, this complete mastery over evil affections and carnal lusts, is the highest perfection of the Christian character, and the surest indication of a real interest in Christ.

There cannot possibly be doctrine more seasonable, more wholesome, more awakening than this at any time. It at once comes home to the grand end and aim of all religion, the reformation of the heart and life. It enters, above all, without mystery or circumlocution, upon a consideration of the great business of the Christian vocation, and declares plainly, not only what a man must think, but what he must do, to be saved. There cannot be a subject more useful, more profitable, more edifying than this. There cannot be a subject better calculated to do good, wherever it is entertained, than that which probes the inmost thoughts and secret affections of him, who is occupied, almost without cessation, "with the cares, riches, or pleasures of this life," and being thus weighed down, thus fully pre-engaged, brings but little fruit to perfection¹.

Great commendation, then, especial gratitude, must be due to those who in their selection of this and other portions of Scripture for the edification of churchmen, appear to have so well considered the peculiar wants, the besetting sins, the constraining obligations of all that belong to Christ. In the first place, the exhortation to "walk in the Spirit," gives counsel to those who at present "walk after the flesh." There are probably those amongst us, who are thus minded; some perhaps partially so, others altogether. To them the Apostle addresses himself. He tells them to "walk in the Spirit." He tells them to admit into their souls, and no longer to quench, grieve, or hinder in its work, that spiritual influence, which would constrain them to mortify the "uncleanness, hatred, wrath, envyings, drunkenness, revellings," under one or other of which they are now in bondage. He tells them, that these sins are the very reverse of things holy and spiritual; that they are manifest; that they cease not from their demoralizing work. And he tells them, on the other hand, that "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance," are the things holy and spiritual in which they must now walk, and for which they must now mortify things carnal.

And will the carnally-minded hear these admonitions, and become spiritually-minded? Will they remember, that the admonitions of the Apostle are the admonitions of the Lord, and that if they refuse to hear them, they refuse to hear in his word, and acknowledge in their heart, the high, the holy, the mighty God? Let not the words now spoken be deemed the words

¹ Luke viii., 14.

either of him who speaks them, or of him who has left them on record. Let them rather be deemed what they are, the words of a divine, eternal Spirit, who calls men thereby to repentance, and bids them "be partakers of his holiness¹." Invited, exhorted, reasoned with by so good a Spirit, and finding him ready to help us, if we will only desire his help, let us no longer oppose our wills to his; let us no longer work the works that separate us from him; but at once come unto him, take upon us his easier yoke and lighter burden, walk in his ways of pleasantness, and choose his paths of peace.

And shall we ever repent of so doing? No, indeed. As long as God is what he is, as long as spirituality is what it is, as long as Jesus abides a Saviour, as long as the doors of heaven are open, and holiness leads to happiness, so long shall we never repent of having chosen this excellent way. But let us never forget, that there is an alternative, a fearful alternative, for those who are otherwise minded, and continue wilfully disobedient to the heavenly call. For them an inexorable law puts forth its wrath in threatening. For them, spiritually destitute, there is nought but destitution in all things. And strive as the Spirit and the flesh may now in their souls, the Spirit will in time cease from the strife, for God's "Spirit will not always strive with man²." And then when the Spirit has taken leave of the soul for ever, must all hope of the soul's restoration depart for ever. The carnal mind will be left to itself, and the carnally-minded remain to perish, shut out from all share in the atonement, shut out from the kingdom of God.

But lastly, the cheering declaration, that "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts," is an encouragement to those who already "walk in the Spirit." Christ owns those for his people, who have "crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts," and in all truth and sincerity, "walk no more after the flesh but after the Spirit." They have consigned all their sins, through grace, to a slow, painful, but certain death, and for the love of Christ, their crucified Lord, have persevered in the self-denying resolution in which they have begun. And how does Christ own them for his people? By giving them of his Spirit in that full measure, which is the special portion of his faithful people, a gift which has already, in their case, been put to a good use, and will be put, if faith fail not, to an equally good use in time to come. And Christ will own

¹ Heb. xii., 10.

² Gen. vi., 3.

them for his people by answering their prayers, and giving them even more than they desire. And Christ will own them for his people, by never leaving or forsaking them, even when they are forsaken by all the world, even when the world itself is vanishing from their view. And Christ will own them for his people, by making "all things work together for their good¹," even for their temporal, as well as spiritual, good. And when the great end of their existence in this world is at length answered, and they have "fought the good fight, and finished their course, and kept the faith²," Christ will own them, finally and once for all, for his people, by admitting them into his presence in glory, and keeping them with him in all bliss and security, in all joy and heavenly happiness, for evermore.

THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. *Gal. vi.*, 11 to 18.

11 Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.

12 As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

13 For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

14 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world

is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace *be* on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

17 From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

18 Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit. Amen.

The Apostle here, in his usual forcible manner, draws a contrast between his own method of obtaining converts to the faith in Christ, and the method pursued by others. He shows, that there were certain apparently very zealous teachers among them, who gained many proselytes to the faith, and used great seeming diligence in accomplishing the work. But he shows, that they mixed up with this appearance of zeal for Christ, a zeal for a form wholly abrogated by the Gospel, even for the form of circumcision. And why, says the Apostle, did they follow this course? Evidently for their own worldly advantage. They desired to

¹ Rom. viii., 28.

² 2 Tim. iv., 7.

have the converts circumcised, that they might "glory in their flesh," and themselves "not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ." The Jewish priesthood and people persecuted with implacable malice and animosity all Christian teachers, who proclaimed the expiration of the Mosaic covenant and its complete nullity. And hence the Christian teachers, who, like the Apostle and others, preached the cross of Christ alone, and declared it to be "the only name under heaven given to man whereby he might be saved¹," were in danger of persecution both from Jews and Gentiles. To avoid this, and gain favour from the Jews, was doubtless the aim of these time-serving teachers; and both the end they aimed at, and the plan they pursued, are here well exposed by the Apostle, who declares "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" to be the only badge or distinction in which he or any should glory.

And he declares, further, that according to the rule of doctrine and duty laid down in the Gospel, circumcision is not beneficial or uncircumcision hurtful to the soul's eternal interests, but that the great practical truth which mainly affects them, is, the state of the inner man, its new creation in Christ Jesus unto good works, or its "hardness and impenitence." He concludes by invoking the blessing of God on those who walk according to the former rule, and beseeching those who have been actively engaged, with a view to their own personal ease and worldly credit, in persuading the converts to be circumcised, to trouble him no more with their desires of vain glory.

The question now is, how may this subject be made edifying? What is the spiritual lesson which it teaches? And this we may safely affirm to be, the obligation imposed upon all Christ's disciples, to make the motive, on which they labour to advance religion either in the world or in their own hearts, not temporal or carnal, but spiritual and religious. Let those, then, in the first place, whose motive would be found, if they searched their own hearts, to be temporal and carnal, take instruction from the Apostle's doctrine, and amend their motive. The Christian teachers thought to escape persecution and gain favour, by inculcating the exploded doctrine of circumcision. Christian people still hope to obtain worldly applause for their religious strictness, and especially in the matter of forms and ceremonies. They talk, and sometimes even write much, upon the subject of Lord's Day observances, bap-

¹ Acts iv., 12.

tism, confirmation, churchmanship, the Holy Communion, and other externals of religion, but not so much upon the subject of inward change, vital godliness, personal holiness. And their practice very much accords with their preaching. They are diligent, punctiliously diligent in the observance of all forms of religion. The minister never misses them from their seat at church; never notes their absence from their place at the Communion. They are attentive listeners; they are audible worshippers. But no further than this can their praise go. Every thing that meets the eye and the ear is decently, nay, scrupulously, done. The world applauds; the multitude admires; the superficial observer burns to imitate, and glories in commending them. Not a reproach is heard, not an action suspected, not a motive called in question.

But what, perchance, all the while is the state of the heart? What does God think of these formal disciples? How does the Lord regard them? Beneath all this outward appearance of decent religion there lies hid covetousness, and the heart is not in the prayer, the desire for information in the hearing ear, the inward approach to the Lord in the outward presence in his house. There is not the worship in spirit and in truth, the faith in him who is worshipped, the love of a crucified Saviour, the entire renovation of soul, the hopeful anticipation, in and through Christ, of all grace, approval, and acceptance, which is really and only needful. There is not the new creature, which throws off, daily and hourly, the trammels, disguises, and scanty coverings of the old nature. There is not the crucified creature, which looks with indifference on a world to which it will soon be dead, and receives nought but indifference, perchance scorn, from that world in return. There is not, in a word, the desire to glory in what the Apostle desired to glory, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, or indeed any ambition at all to glorify or serve him acceptably, except in a manner not burdensome to conscience, not distasteful to the world.

Let that worldly motive, then, be amended, for it cannot be acceptable with God—consonant with the Gospel—becoming in the Christian. Let covetousness be rooted out, and the heart as well as posture given to God. Let the love of the world be rooted out, and the love of the Redeemer substituted. Let the fear of the world be rooted out, and the fear of the Lord take its place. Let the whole heart be given to him who alone looketh upon it, and the whole glory be not in the praise

of men, but in the praise of God. And the Spirit of God, besought in earnest, will grant this spiritual boon to a fervent and petitioning faith. The heart will undergo a change, and the prayer not return unto the petitioner void. In the soul will be mercy and peace, and with the spirit "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ." And, "walking according to this rule," the Christian will still be diligent in externals, for his heart will stir him up to be diligent. He will still find favour with man, but give all the glory to God.

But lastly, there may be those amongst us, who are actuated in all that they do by the most godly motives, and desire not to escape from any taunt, ridicule, or persecution, to which an avowal of such motives may expose them. Like the Apostle, they "glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," and in every relation of life, in every occupation or calling, will endure for Christ's sake, provocation, injustice, oppression, or any other evil that befalls them, with the most righteous long-suffering and patience. Bearing these spiritual "marks of the Lord Jesus," they are truly and in every sense his people; they turn whithersoever he wills them to turn; they do his bidding, even if it be painful, and take his part, even if it be fraught with danger. Yea, they glory in visitations in which others take no delight, even in afflictions, in necessities, in the heaviest trials, knowing that they minister to growth in grace, are real badges of Christian discipleship, and undeniable proofs of a Father's love. They care not what they suffer for Christ's sake, and feel sure that for all that they lose on earth, they have more than a gain in heaven.

And what must be still their course, what their aim? They must "watch and pray" continually, "that they enter not into temptation¹," the temptation of thinking much of "the form" of godliness, but little of "the power." And like Paul, they must stir up others to the same vigilance when they have the opportunity, reminding them of the spirit of their religion, and assuring them of the peril of formality. And if they thus walk, as new creatures, in that newness of life which never grows old, never needs renewal, never finally dies, which gathers fresh strength as the body decays, and reaches its highest perfection when life is gone, "peace will be ever on them and mercy" in that eternal abode, where he who has taken up the cross obtains the crown, and he who has made experiment of the spiritual, inherits the eternal life.

¹ Matt. xxvi., 41.

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. *Eph. iii.*, 13 to the end.

13 I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man ;

17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ;

19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

The Apostle took an interest in the Ephesians. He loved them exceedingly. There are evidences of it in his Epistle¹. There are evidences of it in his history². And none more fully repaid the care bestowed on them than the converts at Ephesus. And although at a subsequent period, when the Apostle was no longer among them, and St. John addressed them in the Revelations³, they had somewhat "departed from their first works," yet were they still deemed worthy of honourable mention for their labour, their patience, their abhorrence of evil men, their detection of false apostles.

Such were the Ephesians; and in the true spirit of love and brotherly communion, does the Apostle here address them. He had planted their church—worked many miracles among them—laboured to spread abroad in their city the true doctrine—spent much of his valuable time in their cause—made many converts to the faith of those that heard him—and lived to see, after the lapse of many years, abiding fruits of faith, and permanent effects of conversion⁴. Dear to the Apostle as the Ephesians had at a former period been, this stedfastness in the faith must have made them still dearer, and he could not but pour out his soul in prayer for those whom he had found so faithful, in whose spiritual fruitfulness he was more than rewarded, and in whose

¹ Chapter i., 13—16; v., 1; vi., 21—24.

² Acts xviii., 19, 20, 21; xix. and xx., 17 to the end.

³ Rev. ii., 4, 5.

⁴ Paul came to Ephesus for the first time A.D. 54; and this Epistle is supposed to have been written A.D. 68.

eternal welfare he was now constrained to take, if possible, an increased interest. They were still, as men, within reach of temptation. They were still, as Christians, in daily danger of persecution. And at the time when the Apostle wrote, and under the circumstances in which he was then placed, it would not have been a matter of wonder, if they had somewhat wavered and doubted. The Apostle's imprisonment¹, and the many perils and trials to which he had been exposed, might very possibly have lessened him in their esteem as a teacher, and brought his doctrine and principles into disrepute. And the Jewish enemies of Christianity might have taken advantage of the opportunity, to discourage these promising converts still farther, and to insinuate that the Lord was no longer with the people, whose minister he had abandoned to his enemies. Lest, by possibility, these temptations should prevail, and the converts be corrupted or discouraged, the imprisoned Apostle exhorts his beloved Ephesians to be regardless of all the difficulties in their way, and rather to rejoice and glory in the strong confirmation of the faith, and the evidence of sincerity in their behalf, which his steadfastness in suffering afforded. "I desire," says he, "that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory."

He then offers a most earnest intercession in their behalf at the throne of grace, beseeching the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ to grant unto them a most abundant supply of all those spiritual gifts, which would enable them to endure temptation, and bear discouragement. This intercession is given at length in the Epistle for the day, and is indeed a most earnest appeal to the indulgent Father of the great spiritual family, in behalf of his helpless children. It is truly the appeal of a brother for brethren, of an heir for co-heirs, of a member of a family for the other members. Full, but not tedious; importunate, but not presuming; warm, but not irreverent; it is a model of intercessory prayer, and both for matter and manner is worthy of close imitation. The Epistle ends with an animated offering of thanks and praise to God for all that he had done and would do for the souls of men. From its main feature then, the form of intercession which it presents to our notice, let us now learn the duty and true method of interceding for one another.

The Apostle, as a disciple and minister of Christ, interceded for his Ephesian brethren. It must be the duty, then, of all

¹ This Epistle is supposed to have been written towards the close of the Apostle's first imprisonment at Rome.

Christians to intercede for one another—ministers for people—people for ministers—brethren for one another. Scripture abounds in exhortation on this subject. It preaches what it exemplifies, and exemplifies what it preaches. Our Lord himself, the great example and preacher of intercession as well as of every other duty, prayed for his disciples and brethren, that they might be “one” on earth, and “be glorified together” in heaven¹. He prayed for the heedless Peter². He prayed for the persecuting Jews³. And he “ever liveth in heaven to make intercession” for his people. “Pray,” says St. James, “for one another.” “Ask,” says St. John, “for him that sins not unto death,” “and the Lord will give life⁴.” Our Apostle often asks the prayers of his converts⁵, and assures them that he gives them his in return⁷. And must not we do the same? Must not we pray for one another? Must not we pray for all, even for our enemies; and especially for our neighbours, relations, families, children, superiors, inferiors, but above all for our ministers and believing brethren? There must however be the principle in the heart which induces intercession, before intercession can be made. And that principle is love. We must first love our brethren, before we shall have the will to remember them in our prayers. It was so with our Lord. His love for his disciples constrained him, and still constrains him, to be their Advocate with the Father. Our Apostle proved his love for the Ephesians by the interest he ever took in their spiritual affairs, and this strong and lively interest prompted him to pray, as well as exhort, that they might “not faint at his tribulations for them, which was their glory.”

Such, then, must be the spirit of intercessory prayer. It must be offered in love; it must spring from love; it must tend to love; and unless there be this principle to give the impulse, it will do no good, possess no sincerity, yea, most probably not be offered at all. Has this love been established in our hearts, this love by which faith worketh, Christ constraineth, peace abideth, this love, without which we are as nothing, even “less than nothing and vanity?” Let us diligently and speedily ascertain this, and upon the issue of the inquiry let us act. Be it remembered, more particularly, that if this love is not in us

¹ John xvii., throughout.

² Luke xxii., 31, 32.

³ Luke xxiii., 34.

⁴ James v., 16.

⁵ 1 John v., 16.

⁶ 1 Thess. v., 25; 2 Thess. iii., 1; Heb. xiii. 18.

⁷ Rom. i. 9; Eph. i., 16; 1 Thess. i., 2.

and abounds, we shall have occasion to pray for ourselves, before we can pray for others; yea, and we shall have occasion to ask the prayers of others, for we shall greatly need them.

And what further does the Apostle teach us in this form of intercession? He teaches us the chief subject of intercessory prayer, grace; grace which will effectually "strengthen the whole of the inner man with all might," and implant in it a strong faith, an overflowing love, an experimental knowledge, and a fulness of satisfaction and enjoyment, even beyond what we can ask or think, in all spiritual things. He sets not the chief value in prayer on what too many set the chief value in life,—temporal prosperity. Yea, temporal prosperity, or any temporal want, he not even so much as mentions in his intercession, deeming, doubtless, that God would give it, if necessary, even without asking, and making it his main principle to seek first for himself, and hence most naturally first for others, "the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

But finally, not only do we hence gather, that intercessory prayer is a most important and necessary spiritual duty; that it must spring from great interest taken in those interceded for; and bestow primary attention in its supplications on subjects of a spiritual kind; but also that they who use intercession, should be men that will avail much. "God," we are assured, "heareth not sinners¹, but the righteous man's prayer he heareth²." And the Apostle, we know, was a man of this kind, a man truly converted to God, an exemplification in himself of all the things he desired in prayer for others, and a spectacle, at that very moment, in his imprisonment at Rome "for the defence and confirmation of the Gospel," of most stedfast faith and love.

And what must we be, to be fit to pray for others, and, praying for others, to obtain? Not self-righteous—not formalists—not wilful sinners—but men already experienced in the eternal and unspeakable value of the things to be sought for others—anxious to assure to our brethren what we ourselves at present enjoy—pure at heart as well as in appearance—humble in the extreme, although "having somewhat whereof to glory"—making Christ the inhabitant of our souls by faith—rooted and grounded in love—possessed of an experimental knowledge of the Gospel—full of all the other gifts and graces which the Spirit

¹ John ix., 31; Job xxvii., 9.

² Prov. xv., 29; James v., 16, 17, 18.

implants and sustains in the inner man—and even then, not pleaders in our own names, but in the name of Jesus Christ, the great Mediator and Advocate, the only propitiation for sin, who “ever liveth to make intercession for us¹.”

THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. *Ephes. iv.*, 1 to 6.

I THEREFORE, (the prisoner of the Lord,) beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

2 With all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love;

3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;*

5 *One Lord, one faith, one baptism.*

6 *One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

Happiness is professedly, if not really, the aim of all. It is the universal object of desire, the good of which every creature living desires the attainment. There is no country or people, no community or family in any corner of the globe, where, if the question were asked of all individually, each would not answer for himself, that he wished to be happy. There might be different modes of estimating, attaining, realizing, enjoying happiness, but all without exception would covet it; all without exception would use their utmost endeavours to attain it. But although all desire happiness, few unfortunately attain it. A whole life passes away in the pursuit, and it is not gained. Great anxiety has ever been felt; great sacrifices have ever been made; time, thoughts, talents, have all been brought to bear upon the one end in view; all other pursuits have been neglected; the one great pursuit has been the sole, uniform, consistent pursuit; and at last, at the close of life, and perchance even before, it is found that the object has been missed. Either happiness, in the shape desired, or indeed in any shape, has never come; or there has been, for a little while, the appearance of happiness, and then it has vanished away.

And why has this been? Why is it so continually the case? The real truth is, that few men know what constitutes happiness, and hence the object is missed, the mistake arises. The carnal mind imagines, but does not know, the source, the method, the purpose of true happiness. Its own object is

¹ Heb. vii., 25.

nothing, even when it is gained; and mocks him who has sought it with so much zeal, with a false semblance which soon disappears. There is but one source of happiness in the world that never brought disappointment, never failed to fulfil its promise,—and that source of happiness is the hope of eternal life, the hope laid up for the soul in the Gospel, and assuring to it, through a crucified Saviour, on the only conditions of true faith and fruitful repentance, all joy and peace in believing, everlasting joy and peace at the last.

But why, even among Christians who profess to seek this species of happiness and this alone, is discontent, disunion, and misery very often to be found? Because all are not true Christians; all are not disciples who walk by the same rule and mind the same thing; all are not men who bring forth those peaceable fruits of the Spirit, “against which there is no law¹,” and of which there is but one blessed result. The few holy and humble-minded believers, who “walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit²,” although blest with a joy that no man taketh from them, and doing their best to make all around them as happy and holy as themselves, possess but limited influence; but wherever it extends there is happiness. A family thus influenced, and in the main spiritually-minded, will generally be at peace within itself. Spirituality engenders peace, and peace ensures happiness. On the contrary, wherever there is strife, there must be sin; for sin is the cause of strife, and in strife there is great trouble.

The Apostle throws much light on the subject. He tells us plainly, that “the unity of the Spirit” should be “the bond of peace,” and then points out distinctly what is “the unity of the Spirit,” and how it may become “the bond of peace.” “Endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” You have “the unity of the Spirit,” because you have “one body and one spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” And having this “unity of the Spirit,” you should endeavour to make it “the bond of peace,” by “walking worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.”

Such is St. Paul's outline of the scheme, whereby man, under the dispensation of the Gospel, may impart and receive,

¹ Gal. v., 23.

² Rom. viii., 1.

as a social being, general or partial happiness. But since the gate is so strait, and the way so narrow, whereby we obtain access to happiness, and few there be that find it, let us take advantage of the Apostle's argument to impress upon our hearts more strongly the expediency of ensuring an object so necessary to salvation.

First, then, we have, like the Ephesians, "the unity of the Spirit." We are one in all things spiritual. Our outward profession, our spiritual guide, our hope, our Lord, our faith, our baptism, our God and Father, are the same. They are the visible signs of a common agreement in fundamental principles. They are acknowledged outward tokens of religious unanimity and concord. But is there not too little endeavour to develope this "unity of the Spirit" in practice? Is there not, on the contrary, almost as great a difference in practice, as there is unity in principle? Is there not among us who are professedly united Christians, constant contention, frequent litigation, unseemly animosity, inveterate malice? Is there not, on the slightest provocation, most violent passion? Is there not, without any provocation at all, quickness to imagine a wrong? Is there not often division? Is there not sometimes alienation? To deny this would only be to deny what all who have ears to hear must hear, and all who have eyes to see must see. Indeed we ourselves must acknowledge that in our own hearts, very often, the spirit of discord dwells, and that to do and say what "makes for peace," is not our prayer, our occupation, or our endeavour, at all times. And we very well know, and feel, that whenever we are thus situated, we are not happy.

The question, then, arises in conclusion, "whence come these wars and fightings among us? Come they not even of lusts that war in our members¹," lusts that our faith is too weak to overcome, our love too nominal to keep in order, our unity of the Spirit too languid to bring into subjection? How then may we become more peaceable, more united, and, by consequence, more happy? The Apostle's counsel at once suggests itself, "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." Call into action the high principles which, in common with your brethren, you profess, and let them henceforth constrain you, as they ought, to mortify all passions fatal to peace, and cause you to live, as well as to profess, in unison.

¹ James iv, 1.

Such, then, be our course, if we would live in peace, and be really happy. Our pride is the cause of contention; our unruly tempers are the obstacles to peace. Let the Spirit of Christ come, and with his soft and gentle influences calm these troubled waters. Let him bring down "the high thing in our souls that exalts itself against the knowledge of God¹." Let him make us patient, forbearing, brotherly. Let him make us the very counterparts of our vocation, portraiture of love, exemplifications of heavenly-mindedness, patterns of charity. And oh! let us pray him to make us so, even better than we can ask or think. Let us pray that the spirit of glory and of God may abundantly rest upon us, and from time to time renew the strength of that spiritual life which his power has implanted in our souls.

And surely the prayer will be answered; surely the boon will be granted. We shall soon become, by the divine Spirit dwelling in us, like brothers in a family, united to Christ our head by faith, united to one another as brethren by love, one in doctrine, one in practice, at peace with ourselves, at peace with all around us, keeping that peace which the Lord left with us, inheriting that peace which he has given to us.

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. 1 Cor. i., 4 to 8.

4 I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;

5 That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge;

6 Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:

7 So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:

8 Who shall also confirm you unto the end, *that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The subject for our consideration this evening is a brief but fervent expression of devout thankfulness, on the part of the Apostle Paul, for some very signal tokens of divine favour and approval, which the Lord had recently bestowed upon the Corinthians. The tokens thus vouchsafed to these promising converts had evidently been spiritual gifts of some kind or other, and these in great abundance, and with a probability, if they continued faithful, of still further abundance and increase. The gifts in question had already brought forth fruit in the

¹ 2 Cor. x., 5.

Corinthians, and the Apostle, while he expresses his thankfulness to God for so evident a manifestation of his past favour, prays earnestly that all that has been so well begun, may "continue unto the end; that they may be blameless in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ."

The Apostle, as the great instrument, in the hands of God, of their conversion, naturally feels thankful for the testimony afforded, in these extraordinary gifts, of the success of his own ministrations, and as well for himself, as in behalf of those whom he holds so dear, desires to be unceasingly thankful. We will note, then, for our spiritual improvement, first, the Apostle's thankfulness; secondly, the ground of it; thirdly, the mode of expressing it. First, the Apostle was thankful. His heart overflowed with gratitude; was full of love, full of joy, full of a sense of obligation. And it was an emotion expressed daily, felt habitually. Surrounded, as he was at all times, by danger, harrassed with anxiety, burdened with affliction, his soul had not lost its relish for pleasurable sensations. There was much to be remembered, much to be looked forward to daily, that ought abundantly to minister gladness and more than balance any sorrow. Are we prepared to feel, to think, to speak thus? Are we open to impressions of this kind? Are we cheerful—joyful—thankful—ready to look on the bright side of every thing—willing to take in good part whatever happens, be it joyous or grievous—and to account it a mercy? But perchance we are murmurers—insensible to mercies—prone to despondency—slow to be thankful. Perchance we are impatient—morose—mindful only of miseries—never thoughtful of blessings. Which of these very opposite frames of mind is in reality most consistent with the spirit of the Gospel and a hopeful consciousness in the soul of peace with God through Christ, the Apostle, a most competent authority, here, and in many other passages, testifies. If we already possess this thankful, hopeful, believing spirit, let us treasure it as one of our sweetest experiences of Gospel privileges, and see that it rest not on a false foundation. And if we have it not, let us pray for it, and watch while we pray, for sin must be still in us.

We will note, further, the ground of the Apostle's thankfulness. He was thankful on behalf of his Corinthian converts, "for the grace of God which was given them by Jesus Christ, that in every thing they were enriched by him in all utterance and in all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was con-

firmed in them, so that they came behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." He was thankful, as their spiritual instructor and father, that the great Head of the church had so far prospered his teaching, and vouchsafed to the converts, in answer to his prayers and in confirmation of his labours, not mere temporal endowments, not perishable gifts, not worldly wisdom, not great prosperity, but an abundance of spiritual riches. He was thankful on their behalf, and thought not of himself. And he was thus thankful always, for there was "nothing to intermeddle with his joy¹." Here, then, is another lesson taught, another example set, from which we may learn righteousness. We, to be in a right state, must be men that take an interest in the welfare of our fellow-believers, and especially in their spiritual welfare. Although not their pastors and teachers, we are as much bound as they to love them, and in token of our love to show diligence in converting them from the error of their way, and thankfulness when they have been "enriched in all utterance and all knowledge." Although not their relations according to the flesh, we are of the same spiritual family in Christ Jesus, and must esteem them when they "do the will of God," as our "brother, and sister, and mother²." And we must be careful not to magnify ourselves when we do spiritual good to our brethren, and careful, above all, not to envy any high position they attain. On the contrary, Christian humility constrains us, while we rejoice that the Lord has thus far blessed our labours, to give him all the praise. And Christian love constrains us, when we see those in whom we have taken a great interest increasing with the increase of God, to stir them up to still greater diligence. And how shall we know, humanly speaking, that those in whose souls we have laboured to sow the precious seed, are bringing forth fruit unto holiness? When we see that "testimony of Christ" which is written and engraven in the Gospel, as plainly written and engraven in the lives and conversations of our spiritual children. When we see them "enriched in all utterance," their "speech sound and not to be condemned," "the communication proceeding out of their mouth not corrupt," but "good to the use of edifying," and so good that it "ministers grace to the hearers⁴." When we see them "enriched in all knowledge," the knowledge that Christ died for them—the knowledge that without him they

¹ Prov. xiv., 10.² Tit. ii., 8³ Matt. xii., 50.⁴ Eph. iv., 29.

are perishing—the knowledge that unto him they must come if they would have life—the only true, only valuable, only improving knowledge, “the knowledge unto salvation.” Then may we indeed rejoice, for God has been very gracious. Then may we indeed be thankful, for there is much whereof to be thankful. Then should we indeed pray, that those in whose behalf we have been thus abundant in thanksgiving, may be “confirmed unto the end, and be blameless in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Finally, in what manner does the Apostle here say, that he expressed his thankfulness? He tells us, that he thanked his God. His God had conferred the benefit. The grace of his God had given the increase. And the grace of his God had come by Jesus Christ his Son. How then could the thankfulness felt be duly expressed, but in the prayer of thanksgiving? Man had worked, but God had blessed. The thankful heart overflowed with thanks, and the mouth must conduct the thanks to God. And must we not act thus, if ever we labour successfully in the cause of Christ? Must we not feel and say with the Psalmist, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give the praise, for thy loving mercy, and for thy truth’s sake?” Must not this be the acknowledgment, even if we have been the benefactors of others in a worldly sense? And must it not much more be the acknowledgment, if we have been enabled to do them spiritual good?

Let the divine goodness, then, be the subject on which we most gladly dwell, both in prayer to God, and in converse with man. Thankful for our own means of grace, as well for those vouchsafed to others, let us think gratefully of the past, and turn hopefully to the future, assured that all we have received or can expect must come from Christ, assured that nothing has been deserved, assured that nothing can be requited, assured that “all will work together for good.”

¹ Ps. cxv., 1.

² Rom. viii., 28.

THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. Eph. iv., 17 to the end.

17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,

18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

19 Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

20 But ye have not so learned Christ;

21 If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:

22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

25 Wherefore putting away lying,

speaking every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

26 Be ye angry, and sin not: Let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

27 Neither give place to the devil.

28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

30 And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

It is to be feared that the Ephesians, when the Apostle gave them the advice contained in this Epistle, had departed from the practice of Gospel principles. Forgetting that the Gospel, unlike many other systems of religion and philosophy, was not a matter of speculation or a code of forms, but a practical, heart-searching, regenerating religion, they had most probably, at that time, contented themselves with a profession of new principles, and not made the rule of faith the rule of life.

The Apostle recalls them from this strange, but not unaccountable delusion, to "the way, the truth, and the life" of the Gospel. He shows them, that they were retaining Gentile impurities, while they were professing a religion of abstinence; and proves that the clothing of the heart must be changed as well as the clothing of the profession, if consistency was to be a feature in their character. The Gospel, he assures them,

inculcated this doctrine, and ordained a rule of faith at once consistent, intelligible, and uncompromising. The lesson which they had learned in the school of Christ, (if indeed they had learned it and had been "taught by him as the truth is in Jesus,") was, that they must "put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of their mind, and put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness." He then enumerates the many sinful propensities, which must henceforth be put away, if they would carry out this new principle of action to the fullest extent. Lying, anger, malice, theft, corrupt communication, resistance to the Holy Spirit, evil speaking, must be thus put away,—and the very opposite virtues of truth, industry, edifying communication, kindness, tender-heartedness, forgiveness of injuries, learned and practised instead. Thus would they be, in every point of view, new creatures; new in profession—new in spirit—new in life—and so carry out in all its comprehensive fulness, the theory of their new religion. Thus would they be a complete contrast to their former selves, when, as Gentiles, they followed a Gentile conversation. Thus would they no longer be Christians only by profession but Gentiles in heart, vain in mind, "darkened in understanding," "alienated, through ignorance, from the life of God," insensible to good impressions, "given over unto lasciviousness," but lively and faithful delineations of all the good principles they professed.

The obvious conclusion at which every Christian reader or hearer will arrive, who interprets this doctrine aright, is, that it affects him materially, as a professor of Christian principles. And the way in which it affects him he will find to be twofold. First, it probes him to the very soul, by asking him if he is "renewed in the spirit of his mind." And secondly, it refers him to a plain matter of fact, whether his life sustains its principles. Let us all ask ourselves, seriously and deliberately, the first awakening question; "Are we renewed in the spirit of our mind?" Are we as changed in the inner as in the outer man? Are we changed in heart as well as in state? Are we different to our former selves—different to the barbarous savages to whom we send missionaries—different to the infidels and profligates that we see around us? Has the grace of baptism taken effect with us? Has the prayer of baptism found its answer? Has the vow of baptism paid its obligation? If so, where is the result?

For a result there must be. The mind, if it be truly and in every sense regenerate, will not be gratified with the vain trifles, with which, in a natural state, it is gratified, but be set on things above. "The eyes of the understanding will be enlightened¹," and no longer darkened. "The life of God," once a stranger to the soul, will be strange no more. The ignorance that ministered to error will pass away. The blinded heart will see clearly, and, in particular, see its own corruption. The feelings, heretofore dead, will be open to every spiritual impression. The affections, formerly under no restraint, will be pure, temperate, and holy.

How do we stand in all these particulars? Can we discover these signs of spirituality in our souls? Do we correspond with this description given of a new heart, or with the description given of a hardened heart? Have we put off the old clothing of nature, or do we still wear it? Have we put on the new clothing of grace, or do we cast it from us? May we all be guided to a full inquiry and a fair conclusion on each of these serious questions. Good must arise from the inquiry. Much will depend on the issue. We shall be proved to be either in a state of sin, or in a state of grace, and that without any reference to outward signs of piety or attendance on means of grace, which, we must be careful to remember, are by no means unerring tokens of the soul's true spiritual condition. If we find, upon making these inquiries with impartiality, that we have become, by the grace of God, new creatures, then may we indeed rejoice, but we must "rejoice with trembling²," and not "think westand," "lest we fall³." But if, on the contrary, we find, as I fear we may, that we are not new creatures, but "corrupt according to the deceitful lusts," then must we come without delay, in penitence and prayer, to that Lord of spiritual life, who has as much power to create a soul as to create a world; and he will make all things new.

But further and lastly, there must be newness of life, as well as newness of heart, in him who is "created after God." Warm feelings and devotional raptures are not alone sufficient. There must be zealous doings and quickened lives. Gravity in thought, and dress, and mien, and manner, is not alone sufficient. There must be great, and serious, and solemn heed given to the one thing needful. "Baptism doth represent unto us our profession, which is, to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto him." And hence the baptized person, if his "baptism represents unto him his profession," will, like Christ

¹ Eph. i., 18.² Ps. ii., 11.³ 1 Cor. x., 12.

dying and rising again, "die unto sin, and live unto righteousness." Not lying, but truth—not malice, but love—not wrath, but self-government—not a hand that takes, but a hand that gives—not a mouth that corrupts, but a mouth that edifies—not a tongue that repeats, but a tongue that suppresses a slander—not a heart that grieves the Holy Spirit, but a heart that receives him—these are the practical proofs, the visible signs, that a Christian has "put on Christ;" and without these he cannot be a new creature.

How do we appear, tried by this severe, this plain test? The solution of the question cannot be difficult. The truth must be clear—the evidence palpable—the fact obvious. It is a point upon which we cannot be mistaken, a matter in which we ought not to be misinformed. We must know what our life is. We can easily ascertain, by self-examination, whether we are living unto God, or living in a state of sin. And let us never forget, as a most urgent reason for making the inquiry, that unless we thus learn, thus seek, thus practise Christ, we cannot be saved.

THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. *Ephes. v., 15 to 21.*

15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ:

21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

The Apostle here shows, that it is wisdom to seek the Lord, and to work out, in all the ways appointed, the principles of the Gospel. He advises his brethren to "redeem the time,"—to indulge not in "excess" of wine, but to desire a full measure of the Spirit,—to "sing and make melody in their hearts to the Lord,"—to "give thanks always for all things to God and the Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,"—and to "submit themselves one to another in the fear of God." And this, he assures them, will be wisdom, no less than duty and happiness.

It will be a sign, that they "walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise," a sign that they "are not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."

We will notice each of the Apostle's exhortations in order,—and in showing how much it must be for the interest of believers to obey them, show that there can be no greater wisdom than the wisdom of living as a Christian. First, then, we are warned to "redeem the time." And what does this imply? Does it not imply that we make so very holy and spiritual a use of the time remaining to us, as thereby almost to bring back and recover the time past—to replace the time wasted, and to revive the time departed? And why should this increased diligence and watchfulness in the management of so precious a talent, be not only wise, but necessary? Because "the days are evil;" time is short; life is uncertain; sickness may be near; death may come; and then—the opportunity of living unto God will be gone for ever. "Whoso is wise will observe these things¹," and "redeem the time." At the judgment-seat of Christ we must give an account of the use we have made of our time; and woe be unto us, if the only account we can give is an account that condemns us, and deprives us of all plea for mercy. We shall be sure to find, if we look back, that our time has been greatly wasted. It will be wisdom, then, while there is time, to retrace our steps, retrieve our characters, and recover our lost ground. Not to do so will be, on the other hand, the greatest folly, for it will assure to us all the misery that has ever been reserved for sin. And can we ever put our time to a better use than the use of our souls? Exercising them unto godliness—obtaining for them help from above—furnishing them with the riches of Christian knowledge—uniting them to Christ their Redeemer by faith—constraining them to perform holy duties by the persuasion of holy motives—we shall double the value of the talent committed to us, heap up treasures of happiness for the last days, and make a wise provision for the hour of death.

It will be a further proof of true Christian wisdom to "be filled with the Spirit," and so to "be filled with the Spirit," that not one work of the flesh shall find entrance into the heart or into the life. And this course will be true Christian wisdom, because a harvest of corruption will be the result in the one case, and a harvest of life everlasting the result in the other. "He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and

¹ Pa. cvii., 43.

he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting¹." He, then, who would escape a death infinitely worse than mere temporal death, and find, in the infinite love and mercy of a Redeemer, hope of life everlasting, must shun "excess of wine," and every other carnal excess that hurts the soul, and ministers to sin. He must in future take this method of effectually redeeming his hitherto lost time,—and become so "filled with the Spirit," that he shall not be able to find place of entrance, much less liberty of action in his soul, for any sensual appetite. So completely will he be occupied with heavenly things, so wholly engrossed with the care of his soul, that he will not find room or space for even a thought of evil. He who once suffered many evil affections to have dominion over him, will now be so strong in faith, that not even one shall prevail. May our recollections be of carnal excess done away, of all fleshly enemies vanquished! May our experiences be of plenteous overflowings of love, of abundant joys in the Lord! And then, our anticipations will be, and we shall never be deceived, of mercy inexhaustible, of glory everlasting, of most unsearchable, most plenteous redemption!

We shall also do wisely to employ some of our time in "singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord." This was ever an occupation of holy men, and is an occupation, in a spiritual point of view, not less prudent than pleasant, not less calculated to chase away evil² than afford full enjoyment of good. The theme of the Christian's melody will of course be Jesus. And what theme can be so elevating, or so full of glory? While other songs are on carnal subjects and of frivolous tendency, the Christian "sings the songs of Zion," and sweetly do they beguile the time, while he dwells "in a strange land:" for they pertain to things imperishable and eternal. While the drunkard roars in the disquietude of his heart, the believer, in the timely exercise of psalmody, chases all disquietude away. While the worldly man knows not how to occupy an hour placed, accidentally, at his disposal, the believer finds time all too short for a contemplation, of which he never wearies. And does he not, when thus employed, make that a pleasure which many deem a labour? And does he not, perchance, when thus employed, take momentary part in a song which never ceases above?

¹ Gal. vi., 8.

² See the effect of David's melody upon Saul, 1 Sam. xvi., 23.

Another proof of wisdom on the part of the believer, and one most closely connected with that of which we have been speaking, is a habit of thankfulness. And ought not habitual thankfulness to be a result of habitual obligation? Ought not, in fact, the whole life to be a perpetual living thanksgiving? And what so meet, right, and completely a bounden duty, as to live to the glory of God, and to do so in a manner which shall be acceptable, through the grace of Jesus Christ? And how humbling is it to think, that even our praises and tokens of thankfulness require a Mediator to make them acceptable? And yet, if it be necessary, will it not be wise thus to offer them? For, surely, upon the manner of performing even a holy duty, must in a great measure depend its use, value, and profitableness, in the sight of God. And surely, if blessings are to be continued, they deserve to be acknowledged. Let "God in all things be glorified through Jesus Christ¹." "By him let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually²."

But it will be truly wise on the part of every faithful Christian, not to neglect the duties of social life: for God, to be served acceptably, must be served fully. He permits us not to be so wholly absorbed with acts of devotion, as to forget what we owe to one another. Yea, rather, he deems it an act of duty to himself to fulfil every obligation of social life, and to fulfil it in his fear and unto his glory. And we shall to a certain extent fulfil it, if we are respectful to our worldly superiors, notwithstanding any greater growth in grace on our part, and kind to our worldly inferiors, notwithstanding any worldly or spiritual superiority. And if any lack the wisdom that should guide the soul amid these difficulties, "let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith nothing wavering³."

¹ 1 Pet. iv., 11.

² Heb. xiii., 15.

³ James i., 5, 6.

HE ONE AND TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. *Eph. vi., 10 to 20.*

10 My brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

15 And your feet shod with the

preparation of the gospel of peace;

16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

19 And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel.

20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

The sum and substance of this portion of Scripture is its opening statement, which is, that the Christian, if he would be defended from the formidable enemies opposed to him, must take unto him that strength of the Lord which is omnipotent. The Apostle then proceeds to point out who those enemies are, and in what consists their formidable character, and devotes the remaining portion of his observations to a description, in figurative language, of the spiritual aids and succours with which the Lord supplies his people. His main aim, however, is to show, both in figurative and plain language, that the Christian, in his encounter with his soul's enemies, must rely on the Lord, and on the Lord alone, for defence and protection.

First, then, who are the Christian's enemies? The Apostle says, "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." It is not, then, with man only that we wrestle, with one who is like ourselves, whose voice we hear, whose shape we see, whose strength we understand, whose character we know, whose device we penetrate. It is not with one only that we wrestle, whose manner of life is manifest, and in whose nature we all parti-

cipate. No, indeed, for then we need only oppose strength to strength, and acuteness to acuteness. Then it would be sufficient to find out our enemy's weak points; it would be easy to conciliate his enmity, and not impossible to overcome him, either by kindness or dexterity. But the enemy whom we have the greatest need to fear, is not an enemy of this kind. He is not accessible, not visible, not to be met in the ordinary way. Worst of all, he is not to be conciliated, not to be baffled, not to be weakened by mere human efforts. He is our enemy in season and out of season. He is our enemy now, he is our enemy ever. And this spiritual enemy, the devil, has great power as well as endless malice. He has ways and means of gaining access to our souls which we know not of; and when he has gained an entrance, he keeps his place with the most dexterous cunning and contrivance, and conducts his warfare against our souls with the most plausible artifice and the most implacable hostility.

And be it especially remembered, that Satan is not alone in his schemes for our ruin. He has his ministers,—legions of wicked spirits—hosts of fallen rulers of darkness,—who are continually plotting in conjunction with him, and working out, with most complete accordance, and most unanimous perseverance, the designs of “the god of this world.” Must not this formidable hostility be a sufficient incentive to us to quicken our energies, arouse our fears, and awaken us out of sleep? Must it not teach us the necessity of action—of watchfulness—of caution—of wisdom? Must it not, above all, show us that we “are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but that our sufficiency must be of God”—that our faith in the mighty Saviour of souls must be implicit and unreserved—that prayer, holy, humble, unwearied prayer must be the habitual refuge—and that grace, omnipotent, unceasing, unfailing grace must be desired, obtained, improved, and from time to time increased? Oh! may such be the case with all and each of us, if not at present, at least in future! May we be brought to know, by the grace of Jesus working in us, our own great weakness, and God's mighty power! May we be brought to know, that our spiritual enemies are many, implacable, and one in purpose,—continually setting in our way obstructions, temptations, and difficulties—and never once ceasing from devices of mischief as long as there are devices to practise! Then shall we at once strive and pray to be

"strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Then shall we "put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." Then shall we "take unto us the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

This brings us to the consideration, secondly, of the spiritual aids and succours with which the Apostle here shows, in figurative language, that the Lord supplies his people. First, the Lord supplies his people with "truth," with that uprightness of purpose and sincerity of intention, which keeps the whole conduct uniform. And this he likens to "a girdle," which holds together the joints of the armour. The Lord supplies his people with "righteousness," with that fruit of a lively faith, which is rich in good works, both of piety and holiness¹. And this he likens to "a breastplate," which is a strong defence of that part of the body at which an enemy most frequently aims. The Lord supplies his people with a peaceful, quiet spirit, which he commends in his Gospel, as of great price, and as a most effectual safeguard against strife and contention. And this he likens to the defence with which the feet of the soldier are provided when he marches against the enemy. The Lord supplies his people with "faith," faith strong enough to support the soul in any danger, and mighty in that righteousness of the Lord Jesus which justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies the believer. And this he likens to a "shield," which a man holds before him with confidence, however desperate the onset, in the day of battle. The Lord supplies his people with a good "hope of salvation," which encourages them, and gives them great boldness, and a sense of security in the hour of peril. And this he likens to "a helmet," which covers the head of the warrior, and affords it complete protection. The Lord supplies his people with "the word of God," with which, if used with effect, and handled with dexterity, they can "give an answer to every man that asketh them a reason of the hope that is in them," and so effectually "resist the devil that he will flee" from them. And this he likens to "a sword," which not only defends but assails, as need requires. And he concludes with general directions on the important subjects of prayer, watchfulness, and intercession, without which none of the foregoing holy principles can be maintained in the soul.

And shall we not take unto ourselves all this spiritual

¹ 1 Thess. v., 8.

² 1 Pet. iii., 15.

³ James iv., 7.

armour, if it can be obtained by prayer, strengthened by watchfulness, and proved in the love, good will, and brotherly kindness with which we mediate for others. Yes, clothed with this heavenly covering, furnished with this armour of proof, armed thus at all points with these innumerable graces and defences of the gospel of Christ, we shall go forth manfully and confidently to the spiritual combat, and wrestle "with all the power of the enemy." We shall seek and find every thing necessary to maintain us in our present high position as soldiers of the cross; and if hitherto we have been faint-hearted, this appeal of the Apostle shall give us courage, and the struggle thus entered upon shall not be in vain. And lo, these are the hopeful words, "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." "Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened¹."

THE TWO AND TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. *Phil. i.*, 3 to 11.

3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,

4 Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,

5 For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;

6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ :

7 Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gos-

pel, ye are all partakers of my grace.

8 For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

9 And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;

10 That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;

11 Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

The Philippians were great favourites of the Apostle. There is less of blame and more of praise in his epistle to the converts at Philippi than in any other epistle; and hence it is most probable that the Philippian converts had been more stedfast and more

¹ Matt. vii., 8, 9, 10, 11.

numerous than any. Be this as it may, it is most gratifying to see such zeal for their best interests, such commendation of their spiritual progress, such intense desire to serve them in things pertaining to their souls, as is here displayed. And it will be most edifying to us, on the present occasion, to gather up the most prominent particulars of the Apostle's statement, that nothing be lost.

And first, we ascertain that Christians may have preferences, if they are not inconsistent with the obligations of universal love. This was the case with the Apostle. He was partial, very partial, to the Philippians; but he loved all men. There were none that he hated—none that he injured—none that he envied—none that he slandered—none that he regarded with uncharitableness—although there happened to be some whom he loved more than others. He rebuked, indeed, but in sorrow. He found fault, but “in the spirit of meekness.” He denounced, but in mercy to the hardened soul. Those whom he rebuked, and condemned, and denounced, he still loved. Nay, the very rebuke, the very blame, the very denunciation, were the effects of real love, and proceeded from a fatherly regard for their spiritual welfare. And in this he only imitated his Lord, who was not the less good to the poor, gracious to sinners, patient toward enemies, kind toward all men, because he loved some with an exceeding love. Yea he “gave to all men liberally,” like his heavenly Father, “and upbraided not¹.” Such, then, was the Apostle. He had the Philippians in his heart, but he cared for all the churches.

In this, as in every other matter pertaining to the conscience, the Christian should be a follower of the Apostle, as he was of Christ. Let him “esteem very highly in love” those who most richly deserve his love. Let him exercise toward them all benevolence—all partiality—all affection. Let him do them all the good he can. Let him commend them highly wherever he goes. Let him serve them, honour them, imitate them. Let him prefer their society, glory in their prosperity more than in that of others, and give them the chief place in his heart. But let him be especially careful that they absorb not all his love. The world at large—the household of faith—the members of his family—all have a claim upon him—if not as one in faith, yet as one in nature; and he is bound to acknowledge the claim, and love his neighbour as himself. Service must be

¹ James i., 5.

done unto all men, as every man has need. Heed must be given especially to the souls of sinners and worldlings. The circle of our charity, brotherly kindness, good-will, must be very wide. None must be despised, disregarded, cast out; for every one in distress is a neighbour, and every one in the world, a brother.

But, secondly, on what foundation did the Apostle's preference for the Philippians rest, for on the same must our preferences be grounded. "It is meet for me to think this of you all, inasmuch as both in my bonds and in the defence and confirmation of the Gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace." As if he had said, "congeniality of character is the bond, by which the grace of God has united us; for by that grace you have been enabled to bear trials as great as mine, and to show the same zeal in defending and confirming the Gospel as I." And this was not assertion, but fact. To their sufferings he thus alludes in another place. "Unto you it is given, in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake, having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me¹." And he speaks of their benevolence: "I received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God²." And, "even in Thessalonica," says he, (that is, at the time when I was in Thessalonica,) "ye sent once and again unto my necessity³." Lydia and the jailer were remarkable instances of Philippians converted to the Christian faith⁴. And most honourable testimony in their favour, as a body, the Apostle gives, in his second chapter, wherein he says that they "obeyed not in his presence only, but much more in his absence⁵." Be this the ground, then, on which a Christian founds his friendships, and rests his esteem. The worldly man loves his brother, because he has companionable qualities, or has prospered in the world, or may make himself useful to him. The learned man gives another the right hand of fellowship because he is learned. The sinner is the friend of sinners. But let lively faith, patience in tribulation, distribution to necessity, perseverance in well-doing, zeal in diffusing and advancing the Gospel, be the ties that unite Christian to Christian. Be a union

¹ Philip. i., 30.

² Ibid. iv., 18.

³ Ibid. iv., 16.

⁴ Lydia was a woman of Thyatira, but resident at Philippi. See Acts xvi., 14, 15, 25 to 34, and 40.

⁵ Philip. ii., 12.

of these qualities their bond and sympathy, their principle of congeniality, their groundwork of preference. Be these the spiritual attractions that bring them together, keep them together, maintain them together unto the end. These are the links between Christ and Christian people on earth. They form the fellowship of the faithful in heaven.

Finally, how did the Apostle show his love? He "thanked his God upon every remembrance" of the Philippians. "In every prayer of his for them all, he made request with joy." And his prayer and his thanksgiving were offered in faith, for he was "confident of this very thing, that he who had begun a good work in them, would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." And his thanksgiving was for things done for their souls. And his prayer was, that their "love might abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, that they might approve things that were excellent, that they might be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." And all this should we do for our Christian friends, if we would serve them most effectually. Assured that a prayer in their behalf would do them more real service than the richest worldly gift we could bestow, we should act upon our conviction, and give them that place in our prayer which they have in our heart. Confident of success in intercession "through Christ which strengtheneth us," but distrustful altogether of its efficacy without the strength of Christ, we should associate that name with our petitions which will ensure them an answer, and make them invaluable blessings. "Seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" in intercession as well as profession, for another as well as for ourselves, we should not so much ask for riches or honours for our dearest friends, as for that pearl of great price which will furnish them for immortality. We should pray that the love of our brethren for one another may attain its highest perfection "in knowledge and judgment," that our brethren may themselves experience "the excellence" of their many privileges, live a blameless and inoffensive life, and bring forth all those fruits of righteousness which tend "through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."

Do we serve our friends, when chosen, in this manner? And do we choose them as the Apostle chose them, for their Christian faithfulness? The answers to these questions will in a great measure show the state of our own souls, their forward-

ness or backwardness in spirituality, their growth or decline in grace. And how necessary it is occasionally, while we are interesting ourselves for others, to search our own hearts and try them by a test of this kind, and so endeavour to find out whether by faith and well-doing we have secured the friendship of "him who sticketh closer than a brother¹," or are still too far from him. And here again we have a test, if we will faithfully apply it. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatever I command you²." "Whosoever doeth the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother³."

THE THREE AND TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. *Phil.* iii., 17 to the end.

17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.

18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:*

19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is *their* belly, and *whose*

glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:

21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

This address of the Apostle to his Philippian brethren is evidently intended as a caution and a warning. There had crept in among them apparently men of loose faith, worldly lives, and carnal conversations, whose proceedings were a scandal to the Christian name, and had "given great occasion to the Lord's enemies to blaspheme," and "to the Lord's people to transgress." "Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." To counteract, and, if possible, to remedy this evil, the Apostle sets before them his own good example, and the good examples of those who "walked by the same rule." "Brethren," he says, "be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an ensample." And that they might not fail to understand the principle upon which he and his holy brethren

¹ Prov. xviii., 24.² John xv., 14.³ Matt. xii., 48, 49, 50.

were acting, he informs them, that "their conversation must be in heaven, from whence also they must look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would change their vile body that it might be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working, whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

Here, then, we see vividly portrayed to us the importance of example. "Brethren," says the Apostle, "be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an ensample;" that is, "look to the example which I set you, and let that be the mark by which you measure other examples, be they good or evil." It is scarcely to be expected that in these, it is to be feared, degenerate days, examples like those of St. Paul and the Apostles can be found, whereby men may "walk safely, and be quiet from fear of evil¹." But although the Church of Christ does not now present to our view so goodly a company of believing holy men, men so nearly approaching "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" as it was wont to do, still does it contain within its bosom many "blameless and harmless" disciples, who are "sons of God without rebuke," and "shine," "in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation," "like lights of the world," and "hold forth the word of life²." To these should we look for "examples of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity³;" and they will show us by their faith and life, that their "conversation, like the the Apostle's, is in heaven," and that, "from thence," both they and we must "look for the Saviour, even the Lord Jesus Christ."

And while we look to the few faithful men that can be found in these degenerate days, for an occasional exemplification of Christian principles, we must still hold up to our view, the examples of old time, and with affectionate veneration and preference, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest whatsoever their histories teach. This we must do as conscience prompts and opportunity offers, but not then only. We should give ourselves, of our own free choice and purpose of heart, these valuable opportunities, and press and force on our unwilling souls, with the help of God's grace and prayer, all that good men have done and suffered in the cause of the Gospel. And if we fear that we cannot reach the high standard they attained, we must remember, notwithstanding, that the nature we inherit is not

¹ *Prov.* i. 33.² *Philip.* ii., 15, 16.³ *1 Tim.* iv., 12.

weaker than theirs, and that although our trials are not of the same kind, our help cometh of the same Lord. What is, however, the fact? Do we believe, love, fear, obey, after their fashion? Or do we make no effort whatever to mark all the good we see? Perchance we may be of the number of those of whom the truly faithful should beware, "enemies of the cross of Christ"—despisers of example—worshippers of no god but appetite,—servants of no master but Mammon. If this be the case we must be reckless of every thing, and our "end" will be "destruction." We are without the trials of the apostles, and yet cannot even reach the standard of a mere moral man's excellence. We are stewards of a little, but careful of nothing. But the examples of which we are so regardless still remain. We can read them, if they are those of old time, in the Bible. We can see them, if they come under our own observation, in daily life. Neglected—they will be fearful aggravations of sin. Heeded—they will be great helps to holiness. O let us not neglect them, lest we show ourselves "enemies of the cross of Christ," and so perish! Yea, rather, let us carefully heed them, and "make the offence of the cross to cease".

But further, we are taught in this Scripture, not only to follow, but to exhibit a good example. And the one will soon lead to the other. If we copy into our own hearts and lives the spiritual walk and lively faith of a confirmed believer, we shall make the light that is springing up within us "shine before men;" and seeing our good works, they will "glorify their Father which is in heaven". There is the same process going on, whenever we insensibly learn evil. The sin that we imitate, we teach. One example begets another. "Evil communications corrupt good manners", and the corrupted good manners become evil communications in their turn, and corrupt whatsoever they touch. But why is it needful that we exhibit, as well as follow, good example? Because all of us, however insignificant we may seem in our own eyes, are in a situation to set an example. There must be those younger, poorer, or more ignorant than ourselves, who will mark, learn, and imitate whatsoever we do, be it good or evil; and hence, if we take no pains to show them the way to heaven, we must necessarily be placing before their eyes what will tend to their destruction.

Be this, then, one of the important truths that we gather from the Apostle's argument, namely, that all men have imitators; that

¹ Gal. v., 11.

² Matt. v., 16.

³ 1 Cor. xv., 33.

all men must be imparting knowledge of some kind to those around them by their life and conversation; and that if the knowledge so imparted be not profitable, it must be pernicious. The force of example is very great. The book is seldom so impressive a teacher as the life. The multitude will follow the multitude, be it to do good or to do evil. In particular there must be greater temptation to imitate where the connection is close, and the habits of intercourse frequent. The relative position of those who live together in the same house, causes almost every thing that is done, and in particular habitually done, to be seen and known: and hence it is impossible for any person so situated, to continue long in the commission of sin and be unobserved. Some one will at last see him. Many will, perchance, imitate him. The propensity, whatever it is, will grieve one, corrupt another, offend all. The way of sin will be made familiar. "The way of truth will be evil spoken of." And widely, extensively pernicious, both in that house and out of it, will eventually be the consequences. But, on the other hand, how many are the souls that may be saved, taught, warned, strengthened, by an example that draws the other way, by a life that comes "of a pure heart—of a good conscience—of faith unfeigned"¹—and has its conversation in heaven! How many are the young it will nurture, the wavering it will establish, the established it will encourage, the hardened it will renew! What endless fruits unto holiness! How sure the end, everlasting life!

And if we will but repent of our sins, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and make our repentance sincere, and our faith that which believeth unto righteousness,—all this good will ensue. The faithful will counteract the bad example. The soul, instead of learning sin, will both learn and teach spirituality. The seducer, instead of hardening others, will be converted himself. And for all those who have thus learned and taught pure religion, there will be, as a most fitting reward hereafter, a change of that body which, under the most promising circumstances, is frail, corrupt, and mortal; and it will be "fashioned like unto the glorious body of Christ, according to the working, whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

¹ 2 Pet. ii., 2.

² 1 Tim. i., 5.

THE FOUR AND TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE EPISTLE. Col. i., 3 to 12.

3 We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

4 Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love *which ye have* to all the saints,

5 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

6 Which is come unto you, as *it is* in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as *it doth* also in you, since the day ye heard *of it*, and knew the grace of God in truth:

7 As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;

8 Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

11 Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness;

12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

It is always a joyful and pleasant thing to be thankful, and particularly when the benefit is great, and has been conferred in a kind manner. A sense of thankfulness must be a sense of happiness, and to perform a pleasant duty must be ever a source of pleasure, as well as a sure way to perform it efficiently. The Christian religion has created new feelings, new motives, new obligations, new pleasures; and while it has not entirely abrogated the old, it has nevertheless greatly modified, renovated, spiritualized, purified them. This change for the better is in no respect more evident, than in the marked modification and improvement of the principal ground of obligation. "Life and immortality have now been brought to light," and the great God who created us, and made himself by his act of creation our greatest Benefactor, has now done us a service in redemption, which the thanks of the redeemed of the Lord throughout an eternity, and the praises of all the cherubim in heaven, cannot repay. Worldly benefits must now cease to be man's chief ground of obligation to be thankful; and even benefits conferred on ourselves must no longer lay claim to all our gratitude, because benefits conferred on others must be disinterestedly acknowledged and felt. God, moreover, who in every sense, worldly or spiritual, has done us

more essential service than any benefactor we ever had, is entitled to a much larger measure of thanks than any; and on this principle does the Apostle here ground his thanks for the measure of grace bestowed on the Colossians. So unspeakably important, indeed, did he deem all affairs of the soul, and so entirely and exclusively the work of God did he deem their final adjustment, that he makes them the only subject meet to dwell upon, and does not even mention other blessings. And for a continuance of these spiritual gifts, and in greater abundance, and more manifest power than heretofore, does the Apostle here earnestly intercede,—and, we doubt not, availed much.

It is still the chief study, the first prayer, the great joy of the ministers of Christ, that their “people walk in truth.” Preaching among them no other doctrine than Christ crucified, and placed over them for no less a purpose than to work out, so far as may be, an end so glorious, they, like the Apostle, pray that God may prosper the work; and they are thankful when he has prospered it. That their prayer and their endeavour may not be altogether in vain, and we, thus abundantly blessed, may not only know what God does for us, but what his ministers do in our behalf, let us now take into consideration, with a special view to our edification, first, the subject of the Apostle’s thanksgiving, and secondly, the subject of his prayer.

And, first, the subject of his thanksgiving. He thanked God for the faith, love, and hope which “the word of the truth of the Gospel” had brought forth in the souls of the Colossians. He thanked God, then, not for any benefit conferred upon himself, but for a benefit conferred upon others. And he thanked, not man, but God, because God, and he only, had wrought the work. The ministers of Christ still rejoice in victories over sin, and still, when the victories are gained, do they ascribe all the glory to God. And what does this teach us, who are not ministers, but people? Does it not teach us that we should rejoice on like occasions and in like manner? Does it not teach us that we should mortify that selfishness which begets jealousy, quench that pride which dishonours God? Does it not teach us that we should envy not our brethren when their souls prosper, but rather rejoice, and that we should take especial interest in their soul’s prosperity, and manifest great delight when they give glory to God? Yea, and what can be so good a test of the state of our own souls, as our willingness or unwillingness

¹ 3 John i., 4.

to do this? How can we so well prove whether we are in the faith or no, as by probing ourselves deeply on all these points? Let us ask ourselves then, whether we ever feel jealous of a brother's spiritual prosperity, or generally gratified at it? Can we acknowledge a brother's spiritual prosperity, or must we generally detract from it? Do we rejoice more in a brother's spiritual, or his temporal prosperity? Are we ever ready to render thanks and praise for benefits conferred, "unto him who sitteth on the throne and unto the Lamb," or would we rather thank any than God, rather glorify any than "a Master in heaven?" Let us ask ourselves seriously these probing questions, and render the true answers. But let us put them at once and in earnest, and our hearts will soon tell us in reply,—whose we are, and whom we serve.

But, secondly, what was the subject of the Apostle's prayer? He prayed that the Colossians might be "filled with a knowledge of the will of God"—with a holiness of walk "worthy of the Lord"—with fruitfulness in good works—with increase in knowledge, patience and long-suffering—and with thankfulness. Here then, as before, the Apostle thought first of others, first of spiritual blessings, and first of him, without whom he that prayed and they for whom he prayed could do nothing. This then should be our habit, if we would pray as the Apostle prayed, and be what the Apostle was. We should desire for our brethren every spiritual blessing that would richly bless them, desire it as a blessing infinitely preferable to any other, desire it in prayer, desire it in earnest, desire it of God.

Perchance many of those around us may stand in great need of the intercessions of faithful Christians—may not have that knowledge of the will of God, that holiness of life, that patience and long-suffering under trial, that thankfulness for all good gifts,—which shows the work of the Spirit of God written in the heart. Or, perchance, there may be those amongst us who are not entirely destitute of these fruits of the Spirit, but, withal, do not manifest them to their full extent, and need them to be greatly increased. These, then, are persons (and we are all surrounded by such) for whom we should be both frequent and fervent in intercession. And what must be the foundation of this Spirit of intercession? Love—the purest, deepest, holiest love—the love by which faith works, and truth is known—for which preachers strive and people pray—with which a brother is served and a God adored. Since, then, we cannot well pray for

one another, unless we first love one another,—since we cannot desire that for one another which we do not already value ourselves,—how can we so well ascertain our own state as by referring to our ordinary practice and habit in intercessory prayer? How can we so readily “behold our natural face in a glass,” as by beholding it through so clear a medium? Where shall we find the truth so well, as by asking ourselves whether we make mention of one another in our prayers; and if we do pray for one another, whether we pray for their spiritual welfare as the blessing most chiefly needful?

And oh, may the Spirit of God enable us to come to a right decision in this matter. May we be brought to see and to know, whether the love of God be in us,—whether the love of our brother be a faithful love,—whether the things on which we “set our affections,”—be the “things above.” And if “our hearts at once condemn us,” and “God, who is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things¹,” knows that we love him not, oh let us at once and in earnest pray, that the work of conversion may begin in us,—that the work of improvement may go on in us,—and that at length, by the gradual but glorious power of the Spirit of God, we may be made to “know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God²!”

THE FIVE AND TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Jer. xxiii., 5 to 8.*

BEHOLD, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign, and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

6 In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his Name whereby he shall be called, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

7 Therefore behold, the days

come, saith the Lord, that they shall no more say, The Lord liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt;

8 But, The Lord liveth, which brought up, and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land.

In these words of Jeremiah are contained two distinct prophecies; the one fulfilled, the other unfulfilled. The prophecy fulfilled relates to the first coming of the Messiah, the prophecy not

¹ 1 John iii., 20.

² Eph. iii., 19.

fulfilled to the final gathering of the Jews. The first coming of the Messiah is thus foretold: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely, and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness." And the final gathering of the Jews is thus presignified: "Therefore behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that they shall no more say, the Lord liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but the Lord liveth, which brought up, and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them, and they shall dwell in their own land."

To the latter of these prophecies we cannot give much attention, because it is not fulfilled; and "it is not for us to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power¹." The Prophet did not prophesy to enable the sons of men to see the things, which they would not otherwise see, before they came to pass, but to satisfy them, when they did come to pass, that the events and the predictions corresponded. And although we may now think we see signs of an approaching fulfilment of this particular prophecy, yet must we not be puffed up with the vain notion that we really do "know the times and the seasons;" but rather wait, with "the earnest expectation of the creature," for the manifestation of the mind of God, and humbly pray with the mourners in the Burial Service, that, howsoever the affairs of the world and the dispositions of events may be ordered, it may "please God shortly to accomplish the number of his elect, and to hasten his kingdom."

But since our faith in this or any other prophecy not fulfilled, will be stronger and under better regulation, if we are made fully acquainted with the grounds of our faith in Jesus Christ, it will be a seasonable occupation, at the present time of year, to note the special force of those which the Prophet this day sets before us. "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I shall raise unto David a righteous Branch." It was always asserted and expected of the promised Messiah, that he should be "of the house and lineage of David²," and although he was apparently born, according to the flesh, in an humble station, yet is he incontestably proved, in his genealogy in St. Matthew's Gos-

¹ Acts i., 7.

² Luke ii., 4.

pel¹, to have been, directly and lineally, a descendant of David. It is on this account that he is called, "the Branch," which is a very usual figure to denote descent from a common stock, and, in conjunction with the word "righteous," very aptly designates "him, in whom was no sin," and whose growth out the roots of the stem of Jesse was more than once prefigured by the prophets Isaiah and Zechariah².

He is also described, as "a King that shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and justice in the earth." So was it, so is it, so shall it be for ever. In the days of his flesh, "the King who came unto his people, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass, and who came in the name of the Lord³," "spake as one having authority,"—erected a spiritual kingdom,—and enacted his own laws. And in all after times did this kingdom or dominion in the hearts of men most "mightily grow and prevail." And so now does it mightily grow and prevail, but not by earthly might, not by worldly power, but by the omnipotence of the Spirit of God. And so shall there ever be a kingdom, far above every name that is named, belonging unto Christ, first here on earth, and finally and eternally, in heaven. In the great day of his power he shall summon all men without distinction, to do him service; and when at length "he shall appear once for all on the throne of his glory, and all his holy angels with him⁴," he shall with like impartiality summon them all before his judgment-seat, and adjudge them their portion for ever.

Again, it is said, that, in the days of him who is the subject of this prophecy, "Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely." The Saviour, when he came, went first "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel⁵," and those that "did abide in his word, and were his disciples indeed⁶," dwelt, in every sense, safely under the shadow of his wing. And so is it still found, and so will it be found ever, by all true Israelites who will seek unto the Lord in spirit and in truth, "take his easy yoke upon them," and learn of him "that Jesus is a complete Saviour." They will be safe from every worldly temptation—safe from every spiritual enemy—safe from earthly danger—safe from the danger of hell—safe now—safe ever.

¹ Matt. i., 1 to 17.

² Isai. xi., 1; and Zech. iii., 8; and vi., 12; l.iii., 2.

³ Matt. xxi., 5. Isai. lxii., 2. Zech. ix., 9.

⁴ Matt. xxv., 31. ⁵ Matt. xv., 24. ⁶ John viii., 31.

"And this is the name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness." And such must be his name, because such he is. He has established his rightful and exclusive title to the name of Jehovah or Lord, by miracles, prophecies, and every high testimony that establishes divinity¹; and the name thus of right belonging to him, "is the name whereby he has been called," in every age of his Church, by every denomination of his disciples. And righteousness, yea, righteousness itself, is Christ Jesus the Lord. None ever born into the world was without sin but One, and that was, "God manifest in the flesh." And Jesus Christ is "our righteousness," "God with us²." If he had been righteousness in the abstract only, and not "our righteousness," he might have been an object of worship—of imitation—of veneration—but not of love. As however, beyond all controversy, he is "the Lord our righteousness," he is of right the sole, supreme, and comprehensive object of all these. He is "the High and Holy One," to whom every faculty of the soul should be raised, every energy of the life devoted. He should engross all our faith, love, gratitude, and whatsoever other emotion or holy energy belongeth to us.

When this prophecy was first delivered, the reign and advent of the Messiah was as yet distant. In these our days, the event has fulfilled the prophecy, and the occurrence has justified the prediction. We verily believe that he of whom the prophet spake has appeared, and appeared as was predicted of him, born "of the house and lineage of David," and yet, in effect, the Lord of David, born our anointed king, born our sure salvation; born our infallible law-giver, born our everlasting righteousness. And surely the ascertained correspondence between the event and the prediction, in all these particulars, must quicken our faith greatly, and so strengthen its foundations that it cannot be moved.

And especially at this time should an edifying use be made of these interesting records of him, who although made man, is eternally God. He came, indeed, in the form of man, and as such suffered, died, and rose again for us, setting us a perfect example—incurring punishment in our stead—and making an atonement for us. And how encouraging a thing is it to know, that our sins are washed away if we are truly penitent; and that our help in temptation cometh of One, who,

¹ John iii., 2; xi., 47; vii., 40. Matt. xxi., 46. Luke xxiv., 19. Matt. iii., 16, 17; xvii., 5.

² Matt. i., 23.

when he took upon him our nature, was tempted like as we are. But let us also remember with fear and trembling, that the Messiah, of whose first coming we have such sure proofs and such comforting evidences, will, as has been predicted of him, come again,—and come again to judgment. May we be daily preparing for judgment, often looking forward to it, serving, with all holy fidelity, that good and gentle Master, who, in the fulness of his faith and truth, will then erect his judgment-seat; and trusting, for our own individual interest in the kingdom that shall then appear, in him only, who, notwithstanding all the works that we have done, must still be “our righteousness,” and whose “name, through faith in his name,” can alone enable us to do any works truly acceptable in his sight.

ST. ANDREW'S DAY.

THE EPISTLE. *Rom. x.*, 9 to the end.

9 If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of

them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

18 But I say, Have they not heard? Yes, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.

19 But I say, did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by *them that are* no people, *and* by a foolish nation I will anger you.

20 But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me.

21 But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hand unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.

The results of every true conversion to the faith of Christ,

and the process by which it takes place, is here described. In the first stage of conversion, the convert, if he is right-minded, "confesses with his mouth the Lord Jesus," and "believes in his heart that God has raised him from the dead." This faith which makes confession unto salvation he has obtained "by hearing," and "hearing" has come "by the word of God" preached, and the word of God preached has been preached by a specially appointed messenger of salvation, by a messenger who has succeeded the first messengers of the Gospel, and, in the Lord's name, "publishes peace," and "brings glad tidings of good things."

Such is the process by which every heathen convert has been brought to "know Jesus Christ and him crucified," the process indeed by which, in every case of conversion, since the Gospel began to be preached, the truth has reached its destination. Andrew, the first convert to Christianity, the first preacher of Christ, is the saint of this day. What can be more appropriate on such an occasion, than a description of the process by which faith cometh and hearing cometh? What can be more appropriate than a full account of that method of calling on the Lord Jesus Christ by which men may be saved? Andrew was once a Jew: he became a disciple of John. Andrew was a disciple of John—and he became a disciple of Christ. Andrew was a disciple of Christ—and he became an apostle of Christ¹. And the instrumentality by which these several spiritual changes were brought about, was the instrumentality of preaching. John preached—and Andrew gave heed to his preaching. Christ preached—and Andrew, admonished by John, followed Jesus. Christ, again, gave the word,—and the disciple obeyed the call to the apostleship,—the fisherman was made "a fisher of men"—and the converted disciple of John at once became a preacher of Christ. "He first found his own brother Simon, and said unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus²."

Thus was Andrew the first convert to Christianity, the first preacher of Christ, the first convert and preacher that made a convert to the faith in Christ. In all these capacities and characters he most fitly illustrates the Apostle's argument, and gives evidence of its truth and correctness. There was, first, preaching, then hearing, then believing, then calling on the name of the Lord, and at last, doubtless, salvation. Andrew continued

¹ John i., 35, 42. Matt. iv., 19.

² John i., 41, 42.

the faithful servant of him of whom he was the first disciple, and during his abode on earth, held frequent personal communication with his Lord, and, without doubt, occasionally brought others into communication with him. And how many in all probability were the hearers, and believers, and worshippers of the Lord, whom this faithful Apostle of Christ, in his progresses from city to city, made living witnesses, in after times, of the efficacy of his preaching. And at length, after a faithful and zealous discharge of his high apostolical duties, did this dauntless preacher of Christ become also a sufferer for his sake, and die like his master on a cross¹, proving what it was to be a true believer, and that, "whether he lived or died, he was the Lord's²."

Let us give heed to this instruction, conveyed to us alike by example and precept, and consider, with reference to it, first, that we have heard the word; secondly, that the word gives us a clear view of duty; and thirdly, that all do not obey it. First, we have heard the word. Each from his earliest years has heard it. Each, as soon as he could comprehend any thing, has been taught to comprehend the truth. The word has been heard in the house; the word has been heard abroad. The word has been heard in the lesson; the word has been heard in the sermon. The word has imparted its information—afforded its comfort—held up its example—pressed home its exhortation—proclaimed its glad tidings—published its fearful threatenings—in the fullest and clearest manner. None can possibly misunderstand it. None can, with any show of reason, gainsay it. None can with truth plead ignorance of it. None can readily forget it. And who has preached this word, which we have heard—delivered it thus regularly—expounded it thus intelligibly? He, who has been sent by the Lord of hosts, and is his duly ordained minister, the messenger, "chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation, to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard³." And what should be the result of this constant preaching and regular hearing? Faith. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," "and whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord," (if he does it in faith,) "shall be saved⁴."

¹ The cross on which St. Andrew suffered, is said to have been of the form of the letter X, and since known commonly by the name of St. Andrew's cross.

² Rom. xiv., 8.

³ Art. xxiii.

⁴ See Joel ii., 32.

Has faith come by hearing in our case? Has the word of God, preached by God's own minister, turned our slowly believing hearts to a true and lively faith,—a faith so strong and confident that it overcomes, through Christ, an evil nature and a wicked world? Or do we think ourselves wiser than the word of God, and frame our own theories? Do we think ourselves wiser than the expounders of the word of God, and become our own teachers? Do we “sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth¹,” and so fulfil that Scripture which saith, “this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them².” Let us “look to ourselves that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward³.”

Secondly, the word gives us a clear view of duty. It says, with great plainness of speech, “if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” This, then, is a comprehensive definition of the nature and workings of faith, and may show us how it should take root and bear fruit. It must be in the heart and on the tongue; with the inward assent, and with the outward expression of assent. Neither of these modes of manifesting faith will be sufficient without the other. If the believer “believes in his heart, that God hath raised Jesus from the dead,” but does not confess that doctrine with his mouth—is “ashamed to confess Christ before men,” is afraid to make any sacrifices for his sake—his belief is not a saving belief. And if, on the other hand, the believer “confesses with his mouth the Lord Jesus,” but does not accept him in his heart as the great and only atonement for sin, his belief is not a saving belief. In the one case there is the fearful assent, which marks the waverer; in the other, the formal confession which constitutes the hypocrite.

Let us carefully bear in mind the distinction drawn between inward assent and outward confession, and recollect, that without detriment to the soul they cannot be separated. Our great aim ought to be to believe unto justification, to “make confession unto salvation;” on the one hand, to believe in such a manner that our belief shall be under all circumstances, however unto-

¹ Heb. x., 26.

² Isai. vi., 9; Matt. xiii., 15.

³ 2 John 8.

ward, a bold, open, and courageous belief; and on the other, to make confession in so sincere and consistent a manner, that it shall appear unto all men to come from the heart. In a word, if we would be true Christians, we must not only have our convictions, but avow them; not only avow certain principles, but hold them. The evil fruit cannot come from the good tree. The good tree must have its fruit.

Finally, "all do not obey the Gospel." It is preached widely, but not so widely practised. And whose fault must this be? Not the fault of the preachers, who bring the good tidings, but his who receives them coldly; who hears every thing, but does nothing; who is ever learning the truth, but never coming to the knowledge of it. And who among us is thus situated? Who is "the disobedient and gainsaying" disciple, unto whom the Lord "stretches forth his hands" in vain? Oh, let each of us search and see what manner of man he is,—and fear, lest this awfully perilous state be his, and in him be fulfilled what was formerly said of Israel, "all the day long have I stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people¹." Let him think that the time must come, when, if he continues to "sin wilfully," notwithstanding his reception of the knowledge of the truth, "the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace" will cross his threshold no longer, and he himself will be of the number of those, who, hearing but not believing, understanding but not obeying, will call in their turn on a despised Saviour and he will not answer, will seek him early but will not find him².

SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE.

THE EPISTLE. *Ephes. ii., 19 to the end.*

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

In honour of the Apostle whom the Church this day commemorates, a passage of Scripture is chosen which describes the

¹ *Isai. lxxv., 2.*

² *Prov. i., 28.*

part taken by the apostles and prophets in establishing the religion of Jesus. We are herein told, that the Ephesians and all true disciples of a crucified Saviour, wheresoever dispersed, "are no more strangers and foreigners," that is, separated from each other, and from the Church in general, by ceremonial distinctions and other outward tokens of estrangement, but are connected together, notwithstanding any apparent difference in external things, by one common bond, that of being "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone."

Of the prophecies of the prophets, and of the preaching of the apostles, Jesus Christ himself was indeed the substance. The prophets darkly prefigured him; the apostles preached him openly, and in all his fulness. The apostles were his chosen friends—his selected servants—his appointed representatives. They knew his will—they were informed of his most secret counsels—they were taught the purport of his hidden mysteries, and most difficult parables¹—they were "eye witnesses of his majesty, when he received from God the Father honour and glory²,"—and they were partakers of a larger measure of the Spirit than was ever vouchsafed to man before, even of that measure of it distributed to them on the day of Pentecost³. And hence they were fully competent to lay that foundation of faith and good doctrine which is contained in the New Testament, and to preach by word of mouth the same Gospel, which they afterwards sealed with their blood.

The Apostle Thomas however was not as faithful in the beginning as he was afterwards. His faith failed; he doubted⁴. And his gracious and considerate Master vouchsafed to him a solution of his difficulties, and with that merciful allowance for natural infirmity (which he equally extended in their backslidings to Peter and the rest of the erring apostles,) willingly condescended to undeceive him. And thus Thomas, whose previous faith had probably been like that of the majority of his former brethren the Jews, speculative, nominal, and unprepared for trial, became firmly established. And having lapsed for a short time, he doubtless became a true believer and a faithful preacher for ever. He was first a member of Christ's visible body, but his faith took an improved form, and in virtue of it, he became a member of that which was mystical and spiritual.

¹ Mark iv., 34.

² 2 Peter i., 16, 17, 18.

³ Acts ii., throughout.

⁴ John xx., 24, 29.

And thus we are led to consider, what true discipleship is, both with regard to individual members of the Church of Christ, and with regard to the Church of Christ collectively. Those who profess to believe in the fundamental and primary truths which the prophets and apostles taught, (the main feature or corner-stone of which is Jesus Christ, and his incarnation,) are members of his visible body; and that visible body, wheresoever scattered, which adopts an outward profession of these fundamental principles, constitutes his visible Church. But profession even of a true faith being not always followed by a complete spiritual conformity to it in heart and life, there must of necessity be another body, confined neither to time, place, circumstances, or even this present world, which is the real, the spiritual, the truly Catholic Church of Christ, and of which all faithful men, living or departed, all holy angels and "spirits of the just made perfect," are actual but invisible members.

To belong to this Church should be the high aim, the earnest endeavour, the hopeful expectation of every member of the visible Church. But truly to belong to it, what must a man be? He must not only believe outwardly with his mouth and lips that Jesus Christ is the Son of God—not only believe thus outwardly by assenting to all the things concerning him which prophets and apostles both preached and spake—not only receive baptism, partake of the Lord's Supper, keep the Lord's day holy, and read the word of God—but exemplify this Christian faith by Christian practice. As a member of the purest branch of Christ's visible Church that ever was planted, he must be diligent to become one of its purest members, one of its justified, sanctified, and truly converted members. And by thus "adorning the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things," he will not only be a good disciple, by profession, of Jesus Christ, but a citizen of that "true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." He will be a "fellow-citizen with the saints," one in spirit, in communion, in affections, and in conformity of character, with those who are blessed of the Lord. He will be "of the household of God," a member by faith and love of his spiritual family, a son owning him as a Father, a son sharing in his Father's love, a son made more and more "nigh by the blood of Christ," taught saving lessons of "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," and "to whom pertaineth," as a child thus docile and privileged, "the adoption, the glory, the cove-

¹ Heb. xii., 22, 23, 24.

² Heb. viii., 2.

³ Eph. ii., 13.

nants, the promises¹." He will be a "lively stone" in that spiritual building, which "fitly framed together," and devoted to no profane use, "groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." And he will, in a word, endeavour, on the foundation of Jesus Christ, to become a truly component part of that holy temple, which, fitly compacted together by that bond of union which all living holy people and all glorified men departed supply, is of them "builded together for an habitation of God, through the Spirit."

THE CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Acts ix.*, 1 to the end.

AND Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him

by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight.

13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16 For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

17 And Ananias went his way,

¹ Rom. ix., 4.² 1 Pet. ii., 5.

and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

21 But all that heard *him* were amazed, and said, Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

The Epistle for this day furnishes us with a most edifying history, inasmuch as it tells us of the instantaneous and complete conversion of a man, who before his conversion, had been, in every sense, "a blasphemmer, a persecutor, and injurious¹," and at the very moment of his conversion was on his way to a fearful mission of persecution, and was breathing nought but "threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." The prominent place which this extraordinary man subsequently held among the disciples and apostles of the Lord, indeed no less a prominent one than that which he had formerly held among the Jews as a persecutor, renders his career very instructive, and invests his character with peculiar interest.

The Church, doubtless on these grounds, has appointed an annual festival in honour of this chief of apostles, chief of sinners, and noblest of the noble army of martyrs. She has, by an ordinance for ever, perpetuated, in particular, his conversion, and calls the attention of her children to it on this day, as to an event which they should all have in remembrance, "by following the holy doctrine which it taught²." The main features, let us now, with the blessing of God, notice.

And first, the time of the Apostle's conversion was remarkable. He was on his way to Damascus, charged with a most cruel mission. He had even come near to Damascus, and was apparently on the point of accomplishing his wicked purpose. Suddenly he was arrested in his course, and by an influence both on body and soul, irresistible and unforeseen, was constrained all at once to become one of those whom he had purposed to destroy. There is great reason here to admire the mighty power

¹ 1 Tim. i., 13.

² Collect for the day.

and great mercy of God. Let the man of the world, whom accident has prospered, and prosperity hardened, see God's mighty power herein,—and fear. Let the desponding, heart-broken sinner see compassion making allowance for ignorance, and consideration extended to prejudice,—and take courage.

Next, we notice the manner or method of the Apostle's conversion. "And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Miracles have now ceased, even miracles for the renovation of souls. But we must not doubt that other means may still be found for softening hearts hitherto inaccessible to grace, and that the Lord and giver of spiritual life, will, as soon as he sees fit, and in the manner he deems best, accomplish the work of conversion. But what were the evident tokens of the Apostle's conversion? We see first, a desire of more perfect information. "Who art thou, Lord?" We see, further, the purpose shaken—the will submitting itself to other guidance. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" We see, again, the whole course of proceeding changed. Instead of search being immediately made for men and women who had undertaken a profession of the new religion, unreserved submission is at once given to the divine direction which suggests another line of duty. He is "led by the hand," "brought into Damascus," and kept there "three days without sight," without meat, without power to do any thing "contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."

And again, behold, the humbled persecutor "prayeth;" "prayeth" to that Jesus whom he had persecuted, "prayeth" for that influence which he had laughed to scorn. All these were signs of change, proofs, yea, and mighty proofs, that God was now in him of a truth; that God whom he had once imagined to be "the God of the Jews only," but now was beginning to believe was "the God of the Gentiles also"; that God who had now taught him that a Messiah had come, and that he possessed all power both in heaven and in earth. Are we bringing forth these fruits, exhibiting these signs of true conversion, of conversion, I mean, not from infidelity to faith, but from nominal to real faith? Is there in us a constant and unremitting desire for information on the one grand essential doctrine of "Jesus Christ and him crucified?" Is there less and less evidence daily of

¹ Rom. iii., 29.

² 1 Cor. ii., 2.

"the motions of sins in our members bringing forth fruit unto death¹?" Is there a departure, daily and perceptibly, from our purposes of evil? Is there the submission of the stubborn will to the divine guidance? Is there prayer, humble, importunate, patient prayer? Is there a course now taken, directly opposite to all former courses? These will ever be the fruits of true conversion; for conversion, like every other apparently holy thing, will be known by its fruits, and not judged of by its speech. All these fruits were exemplified by the Apostle at the time of his conversion, and afterwards; and less cannot be required or expected of any true disciples of Christ. "For this cause," says he, "I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which shall hereafter believe on him to life everlasting²."

Further, the method by which this work of God was perfected, was the ordinary method, under the Christian covenant, of baptism and the ministry of the word. Thus do we see the necessity, under all circumstances of conversion and change, however remarkable, of resort being had to the means of grace for carrying on the work unto perfection; and the obligation under which all ministers of Christ lie, of nursing the first workings of spiritual influences, and "persuading men to continue in the grace of God³." And through the conjoint operation of these ordinary and extraordinary means of grace on the soul of the Apostle, what was the mighty result? It was stedfastness in the well doing thus begun—growth in the grace thus implanted—continuance unto the end, through the same grace, "in all holy conversation and godliness." The Apostle's first public token of discipleship was to "preach Christ that he is the Son of God." And the whole of his remaining life was devoted to the cause; and his final departure was a crowning proof of faithfulness. If in any of us there is at this time the beginning of a distaste for a besetting sin, the dawn of an aspiration after a spiritual gift, let our soul at once have recourse to the means of grace, let it seek counsel and relief of the ministers of Christ, let it watch in the same unceasingly; and then God, even our own God, will grant his blessing.

¹ Rom. vii., 5.

² 1 Tim. i., 16.

³ Acts xiii., 43.

THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE, COMMONLY CALLED THE PURIFICATION OF SAINT MARY THE VIRGIN.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Mal. iii., 1 to 5.*

BEHOLD, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me : and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in : behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.

2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' sope.

3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they

may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

4 Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

5 And I will come near to you to judgment: and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts.

The prophecy adapted to the service of the present festival was a testimony beforehand of the Messiah's first coming, and of certain circumstances connected with it. The Messiah literally appeared for the first time, as such, when he appeared in his mother's arms in the temple, and was acknowledged by old Simeon. There can be but little doubt that this aged son of Abraham, when "he took Jesus up in his arms," took him up also into his heart by faith, and that Jesus, when he fulfilled the law¹, was fulfilling a prophecy. And thus, in a sense, was that which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophet fulfilled; which saith, "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple;" and, "he shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." But without insisting farther on the apparent coincidence between the portion of Scripture appointed for this day's Epistle, and the event in our Lord's life celebrated on this day, we may now proceed to notice with a view to our own particular edification, first, the token or warning of Christ's coming, indicated in this prophecy; secondly, his actual coming; and thirdly, the results of his coming.

In the first place, the Prophet foretels, that "the Lord would send his messenger, who should prepare his way before him." The Baptist, wonderfully born and specially set apart, was sent,

¹ Exod. xiii., 2, 14, 15. Exod. xxii., 20.

shortly before the appearance of Christ, to announce his immediate coming. "In those days," says the Evangelist, "came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee¹." This passage from the Prophets applied by the Evangelist to the Baptist, is, it should be observed, the opening passage from the Prophet Malachi contained in this day's Epistle, and was expressly cited by Christ when he described the Baptist's office to the multitudes. "And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold they that wear soft clothing are in king's houses. But what went ye out for to see? A Prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a Prophet; for this is he of whom it is written, Behold I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee²."

But this herald was to be the token or warning, secondly, of that actual coming of Christ, which, so far as his appearance in the temple is concerned, is the special subject of this day's celebration. His first appearance in the temple was, as we have already shown, his appearance in infancy. But not only was Christ brought thus early to the temple, and so enabled to take possession, without delay, in his human character, of that house, of which, by eternal prescription and inalienable right, he was already the Lord, but he came thither himself when he was twelve years old, and attended to "his Father's business³." Hence, soon after he entered upon his ministry, he expelled, without reserve or hesitation, as One who had authority, the buyers and sellers of merchandize⁴. Hither, as to a most natural scene of triumph, was he conducted spontaneously by the multitudes strewing the branches, and the children singing hosannas⁵. Here, as oft as he resorted to Jerusalem, he taught daily, performed miracles, delivered prophecies, held conversations⁶. And of this holy place, thus highly favoured and specially glorified, did he foretel, with tears

¹ Mark i., 2. Compare also Matt. xi., 10. Luke vii., 27.

² Matt. xi., 7, 8, 9, 10.

³ Luke ii., 49.

⁴ John ii., 16.

⁵ Matt. xxi., 8.

⁶ Matt. xxi., 14; xxvi., 55. Mark xiv., 49. Luke xxii., 53.

and mourning, the utter destruction¹, which eventually took place at a time and in a manner which most exactly accorded with the prediction², and most clearly proved the Prophet to be the most mighty God himself. But, further, the character in which the Messiah was preordained to come to his temple, was exactly that in which Christ eventually appeared. He was "the Messenger of a covenant" which brought "good tidings of great joy to all people," which reconciled lost sinners to God, and established on most sure foundations "peace on earth," "good will to man³," and everlasting "rest for the people of God⁴." In such a covenant as this, those that were so largely benefited would most assuredly take "delight." And, accordingly, the more fully it was understood in those days, the more openly it was made manifest, the more certainly it was proved, in the fulness of time, to have "brought life and immortality to light," and to have dispelled all darkness and delusion, so in the same proportion did joy spring up in the hearts of believers, the people heard the word of the Gospel with greater gladness, and resorted more readily to the preachers of it from every quarter.

But what, further and finally, does the Prophet state that some of the results of the coming of the Messiah were to be? He says, that this "Messenger of the covenant" would be "like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's sope;" that he would "sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and would purify the sons of Levi and purge them as gold and silver, that they might offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." Such was the effect, in a spiritual sense, of Christ's coming. His word and Spirit, his grace and doctrine, purged the hearts, minds, and consciences of men, showing them, first, that they were exceeding sinful, and then pointing out the way, the only way, by which they might be justified. And having thus, by God's grace, made a beginning, the converts were in after times to be subjected to that purifying process of persecution, which would try them, "like a refiner's fire," and cleanse them, "like fuller's sope."

Again, many Levites are said to have embraced the Gospel, and so were literally "purified⁵." And those who ministered in

¹ Matt. xxiii., 37.

² See JOSEPHUS, in his *Hist. of the Jewish War*, Books v., vi., and vii.

³ Luke ii., 10, 14.

⁴ Heb. iv., 9.

⁵ St. Barnabas was a Levite; for which see Acts iv., 37. See also Acts vi., 7.

holy things under the Gospel, were in truth built up as "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ¹." And further, the Gospel which Christ taught, by revealing more fully than heretofore the divine hatred of sin—the eternity of future retribution—the coming without fail of a day of account—has raised such insuperable arguments against the sins denounced in this prophecy, that those who commit them must incur the awful responsibility with less likelihood of impunity, less hope of escape, less facility of excuse than ever.

The ministers of Christ tell us of his second coming; his second coming will be a coming to judge the world: and the results of that second coming will not be trial, probation, means of purification, exercises of self-denial, as they now are—but final judgment. "Seeing, then, that all these present things shall some time or other be dissolved;" that there is a day of God coming, "wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat;" that there will be hereafter "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," "what manner of persons ought we now to be in all holy conversation and godliness;" how "diligent should we be that we be found of God" in that day, "without spot and blameless²." The blood of Christ, that true "fuller's sope," can wash our soiled robes, and make them white. "The trial of our faith is much more precious than of gold, which perisheth, though it be tried with fire³." Faith must go through its trial,—repentance must bring forth its fruits. There must be faith,—there must be repentance,—there must be that work going on, which separates the soul's dross from its pure ore,—which makes those sins which were as scarlet, as white as snow. Christ now sits as this "refiner," and "purifier of silver." In a little time, perchance, he in this sense may be gone, and you may vanish away. "Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation⁴."

¹ 1 Pet. ii., 5.

² 1 Pet. i., 7.

³ 2 Pet. iii., 10, 14.

⁴ 2 Cor. vi., 2.

SAINT MATTHIAS'S DAY.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Acts i, 15 to the end.*

15 In those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty,)

16 Men *and* brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

18 Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.

19 And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; inasmuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, *Aceldama*, that is to say, The field of blood.

20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell there-

in: and his bishopric let another take.

21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all *men*, show whether of these two thou hast chosen,

25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

26 And they gave forth their lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

The main feature in this portion of Scripture is the appointment of Matthias to take the place of the traitor Judas. The mode of this appointment is also specified, as well as the occasion of it. Let us first observe the occasion of it. Judas betrayed his Master, and "by that transgression fell;" fell not only from faith, love, goodness, truth,—not only from peace here,—not only from glory hereafter,—but from that place of high honour which he held as an apostle and friend of Christ. He justly forfeited the apostleship—he deservedly lost all character—he openly broke off all connection with Christ—deprived himself of the sympathy even of bad men¹—and not inconsistently finished a most abominable course by committing an act, which hurried him prematurely into that perdition, which he had so well and so surely earned. He who had been an apostle of Christ, thus excluded himself from even a hope of salvation. He who had from first to last heard the heavenly doctrine—seen the holy example—

¹ Matt. xxvii., 4.

known the pure life—witnessed the wonderful miracles—experienced the infinite lovingkindness of the Saviour of the world—had contrived to learn the worst of lessons even in that best of company, and sunk all at once into the lowest depths of perdition.

And what was the primary cause of all? Avarice; the love of money, the iniquity of covetousness. And what does so fearful an instance of apostasy teach us, who, though not apostles, are yet disciples of Christ? Does it not teach us to be very distrustful of our own strength, since even at the best it is but weakness,—and to place little dependance on an appearance of belonging to Christ—since something in the sight of men is often found to be nothing before God. A companion of Jesus fell from his stedfastness; fell from the highest place to the lowest; fell never to rise again. And he fell through covetousness. Covetousness was his bane—his temptation—his ruin. How then shall we escape, we, who also eat and drink in the Lord's presence, and in whose streets, through his ministers, he has often taught, if we do not "take heed, and beware of covetousness¹?" Little can we imagine the slow degrees, the subtle devices, by which covetousness, divested of "all appearance of evil" will insensibly, unless we take most earnest heed, coil itself round our hearts, and while a blinded imagination "says peace and safety," insinuate into our souls those seeds of poisonous mischief which will bring forth abundantly "destruction and perdition." On the specious grounds of providing for a family and obtaining a livelihood, will it very often gain the ascendancy, and make us think we are doing no more than our duty, when we are paying the blindest adoration to Mammon. Those especially who are not open sinners, and in a regular routine of outward religion make "a fair show" of serving Christ, does it frequently thus pervert. But the example of Judas will show, that God and Mammon cannot be served together; and the prophet teaches, that where the worshippers are "a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers," "even the solemn meeting is iniquity" unto the Lord. We thus see that those whose "hearts are exercised with covetous practices" are, indeed, "cursed children²," and that "no covetous man," however specially he may put in his claim, "hath, in reality, any part in the kingdom of Christ and of God³." And we see that at last this truth will be made manifest. Even here, an inconsistency in word or deed has often betrayed the real secret of the heart, and revealed the true

¹ Luke xii., 15.² Isai. i., 4, 13.³ 2 Pet. ii., 14.⁴ Eph. v., 5.

character of him, who though not doing notorious dishonour to a gracious Master, has, in his inmost soul, loved a worldly treasure far better. And it is most fearfully true, that in a life to come the consistent friend of the world will be unmasked, and numbered eternally among the enemies of God.

But further, if the traitor Judas fell, "Matthias was numbered with the eleven apostles." The treachery of Judas—the crucifixion of Christ—the cunning of the chief priests—the timidity of the apostles—could not check the spread of the word, crush the infant Church, or baffle the designs of God. Grace was poured forth plentifully; testimony was given to the truth by miracles, and wonders, and signs; and notwithstanding all opposition, hidden and manifest, within and without, a society of believers was formed, and a crucified Saviour triumphed. To complete the outward constitution of a Church thus divinely founded and specially protected, did a band of believers meet, and put trust in the guidance of God. Moved to undertake the appointment to the apostleship by a special revelation from on high—directed in the mode of selection by the same superintending Spirit—prefacing their undertaking with admonitions,—and concluding it with prayer, the assembled disciples "gave forth their lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles." The circumstances of this appointment remind us of our own origin as a Church, and refer us to a feature in our history, as such, with which we should be fully acquainted. It is now more than eighteen hundred years since Christ founded his Church; and although in the course of that time many changes have occurred, he has not permitted any of them vitally to affect his Church. "Perplexed it has been, but not in despair; persecuted but not forsaken; cast down but not destroyed." In particular its original constitution, so far as the office of apostle or bishop is concerned, has remained unchanged; and we, who are members of the Church of England, can trace a direct transmission of episcopalian government, in the form in which it at present exists amongst us, from the original apostles to their present successors, and can feel sure, on the historical evidence of credible ancient records¹, that we are ministered unto by men who have been ordained in a manner accordant with the institution of Christ, and by those whom he has sent.

Be this an additional motive to us, who are members of the

¹ See MOSHEIM'S *Ecclesiastical History*, and MILNER'S *History of the Church of Christ*.

Church of England, to reverence the office of those who minister unto us. In being sent by the successors of Christ's apostles, they are virtually sent by Christ himself. Let us never treat an office so derived, with contempt or ridicule; never speak evil of it; never offer opposition to it; but venerating its truly apostolic origin, recognize the holders of it, who "labour amongst us and are over us in the Lord and admonish us," as lawfully called and sent, and "esteem them very highly in honour, as well as in love, for their work's sake¹." And let us, for the same good reason, obey the admonitions, remember the warnings, spiritualize the ministrations of our regularly ordained pastors with zeal and diligence. Let us listen to them as reverently, "as though God did beseech us by them." Let us believe them to be "praying us in Christ's stead to be reconciled unto God²."

The mode of Matthias's appointment to the apostleship was by lot, a method of decision not unfrequent in former times³, ordained in certain cases of God⁴, "and always held to be a direct appeal to the judgment of heaven⁵." May he, of whom is "the whole disposing" of the lot when it is "cast into the lap," and whose Providence, in every dedication of a minister to the service of his Master, alone rules the issue, bring a conclusion so glorious and permanent out of all man's appointments to the ministry, that his name shall never be dishonoured by unworthy ministers, but his Church be found to the end of time, "a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing⁶."

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Isaiah vii., 10 to 15.*

10 Moreover the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying,

11 Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above.

12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.

13 And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; *Is it a small thing*

for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?

14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

15 Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.

¹ 1 Thess. v., 12.

² 2 Cor. v., 20.

³ Judges xx., 9. Esther iii., 7. Matt. xxvii., 35.

⁴ Numb. xxvi., 55. Canaan is called "the lot of Israel's inheritance." Ps. cv., 11.

⁵ Prov. xvi, 33; xviii., 18.

⁶ Eph. v., 27.

It is a very remarkable thing, that although the Jews of the old time always looked forward in hope and faith to the coming of the Messiah, the Jews of our Saviour's day rejected him when he actually came, not because he did not fulfil the prophecies, but because he did not accord with the notions they had formed of his character and mission¹. Without any reasonable grounds for so doing, they had foolishly invested their Messiah with only a portion of the distinctive properties predicted of him. They gave him glory, and greatness, and power, and victory, but not patience, and long-suffering, and humility, and charity. They thought of conquests of enemies, but not of triumphs over sins. They looked for national, not moral revolutions. They expected temporal, not spiritual deliverance. Their brethren in the present day still think the same. They will not own a suffering-Messiah. They will look only for one that is glorious. And yet in many of the prophecies, and in that especially which is selected for the service of this day, there are indications, not to be mistaken, of lowliness of character, intermixed with evidences of divinity. In particular, the prophecy, divested of all figure or circumlocution, speaks plainly of a Messiah that shall be born of a woman, although in a wonderful way, and of a Messiah that shall eat man's ordinary food, although an "Immanuel" or "God with us." And this ought to have taught the Jews of former times to have expected a Messiah who would both suffer and conquer,—obey and command,—die and rise again. And it should induce the Jews of the present day to relax a little in their prejudices, and read the New Testament, where they will find, as in the teaching of this prophecy, that a twofold Messiah was both foreshewn and did appear; and that "all things were fulfilled" in Jesus, "which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning" the Messiah².

The prophecy concerning Jesus, contained in the Epistle for this day, is particularly well adapted to the occasion, inasmuch as it is a prophecy of the event of his birth, which was announced for the first time as on this day, and was fulfilled, according to the announcement, soon after. "Now all this was done, (that is, all these wonderful circumstances connected with the birth of Christ came to pass,) that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold a virgin shall

¹ Matt. xiii., 55. John vii., 27.

² Luke xxiv., 44.

be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which, being interpreted, is, God with us¹."

The prophecy, thus well chosen for this particular occasion, was originally delivered by Isaiah by command of God, in the time of Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, king of Judah. The sins of Ahaz had provoked the Lord to raise up enemies against him; and Rezin and Pekah, the kings of Syria and Israel, had been severally permitted to bring great calamities upon the land of Judah. At the time this prophecy was delivered, they were bringing their armies into conjunction, and had resolved to take signal vengeance on the guilty land and its guilty king². And so great and so general had the fear of this formidable invasion become in the land, that the people, in their state of alarm, are compared to "the trees of the wood, moving with the wind³." Then was this prophecy delivered, and it was well calculated at the time to allay the popular apprehensions. There was no promise so highly valued—so anxiously expected—so religiously treasured up in the hearts of all faithful Israelites,—as the promise of the Messiah. The mention, then, of his name on so trying an occasion, would at once reassure the people, and comfort them in the midst of their troubles. And it would do more: it would afford them good hope of present deliverance. How very probable must it have appeared to that stricken and heart-broken generation, that he would save them from any impending temporal calamities, who had promised in the fulness of time, to do much more for his people.

And blessed be God, all that was then promised, has been done, and done to the utmost. "A virgin has conceived and brought forth a Son," and he has been in effect and in very truth "God with us." He was "God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself⁴," and he was man taken into God that he might "bear man's sins in his own body on the tree⁵." And thus did he become both a suffering and triumphing Messiah, for when he finished his work he obtained his crown; when he suffered to the extent he was ordained to suffer, he became man's exalted and omnipotent Redeemer for ever and ever.

Blessed, then, thrice blessed be the announcement of this day, which proclaimed for the first time⁶, to a lost world, the

¹ Matt. i., 22, 23.

² 2 Kings xv., 37; 2 Kings xvi., 5, 6; 2 Chron. xxviii., 1 to 23.

³ Isai. vii., 2.

⁴ 2 Cor. v., 10.

⁵ 1 Pet. ii., 24.

⁶ Luke i., 26 to 38.

fulfilment of the ancient promises, and the manifestation of means of reconciliation. And how highly favoured and "enriched in every thing to all bountifulness" are we, the Lord's people of the present day, who, unlike the Israelites of old, or even the personal companions of the incarnate Saviour, really "know him in whom we have believed," derive a large portion of our confidence and rejoicing from his sufferings, and feel sure that both as sufferer and conqueror, he is "able to keep that which we have committed to him¹," until the day of his final appearing.

As a promised Messiah was to be a comforting sign to the disheartened inhabitants of Judah, so let a Messiah already come, be a much more comforting sign to his servants in their hour of affliction. "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement²." Assured in our affliction, by the things already done for our souls, that we have a prospect of seeing eventually even greater things than these, we shall not despond but take courage, not take thought beyond measure for any thing, but "cast all care upon him who cares for us³," and who "with his Son also will freely give us all things⁴." Only let our faith be firm—our patience strong—our hope fervent—our victory over the world, through faith in the Son of God, "ordered in all things and sure,"—and we ourselves "stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord⁵." And then, even in that day of doom, when the voice of the archangel and the trump of God announces another coming of the Messiah, we "shall have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming⁶."

¹ 2 Tim. i., 12.

⁴ Rom. viii., 32.

² Rom. v., 10, 11.

³ 1 Cor. xv., 58.

⁵ 1 Pet. v., 7.

⁶ 1 John ii., 28.

SAINT MARK'S DAY.

THE EPISTLE. *Eph. iv., 7 to 16.*

7 'But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

9 (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?

10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

13 Till we all come in the unity

of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive:

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

In memory of the Evangelist whose day this is, the compilers of our liturgy have wisely made choice of an Epistle which enumerates certain offices of importance in the primitive Church, and among them that of an Evangelist. The main design of the Apostle throughout the whole of this selected portion of Scripture evidently is, to inculcate unity: unity of faith—unity of heart—unity of action in every thing. And he argues most forcibly, that although to every member of Christ's Church is given grace, varying in kind and degree, according to the measure in which Christ vouchsafes to distribute it to him, and to some are given spiritual gifts which qualify them for the highest offices, yet that all these several diversities of gifts and offices, thus unequally distributed, are intended to be subservient to the one great end of unity. And this end he characterizes as the perfection of a Church; and represents under the striking similitude of the members of the human body contributing, severally, to its stature, expansion, and perfectness, the members of the spiritual body, ministering, each in its own measure and manner, to the efficiency and uniformity of the whole.

With reference to the great end, to which these several ope-

rations of the Spirit were directed, he gives us his express assurance that they were "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till all came, in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto the perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, that so, speaking the truth in love, believers might grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ." And with reference to "the differences of administrations," which the great Head of the Church had instituted, with the view of making them conducive to the general welfare of the spiritual body, he says, "unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." "And he gave some, apostles, and some, evangelists, and some, prophets, and some, pastors and teachers." These offices, the divinely-ordained means of so much "grace, mercy, and peace" to the primitive Christian church, will furnish us with a most appropriate method of obtaining valuable spiritual instruction from the festival of the Evangelist.

The office of "Apostle" was the first and highest of divinely-ordained offices. It was, indeed, the only office in the primitive Christian church ordained by our Saviour himself. The others were ordained by men, acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The apostles were empowered to preach, heal the sick, work miracles, ordain presbyters, superintend the doctrine of presbyters, superintend the conduct of presbyters, and "set in order the things that were wanting". And this office under the different name of bishop, but without the miraculous power of the original apostle, is still retained in the Church¹.

The office of "Prophet" was the office of revealing mysteries and foretelling future events. It is enumerated by the Apostle in another place, among the spiritual offices of the primitive Church,—and is also described as an extraordinary spiritual gift, which must be put to its intended use². The office has of course ceased.

The office of "Evangelist" is then mentioned; but it is not to be clearly ascertained whether it was a distinct office in the early Church, or only a general title, descriptive of all ministers of

¹ Tit. i., 5.

² For more abundant information upon this important subject, see HAY'S *Lectures on the authority of a threefold Ministry in the Church*, published, in a cheap form, by the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge.

³ 1 Cor. xii., 28; Rom. xii., 6.

Christ. Philip the deacon is called an evangelist¹, and those whom God inspired to write the four Gospels we call by this name, which signifies a preacher of the Gospel, or messenger of good things.

Whether "Pastors" and "Teachers" were severally distinct orders of ministers, (the one having the oversight and care of particular churches, the other not called to the pastoral office, but commissioned to instruct and exhort the people,) or whether they were endowed with one and the same office, is not certain. Ministers ordained by apostolical bishops, if they "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called," are still, in the exercise of the various functions of their holy office, "pastors," "teachers," and "evangelists," and will continue so (God's promise to his Church being sure) to the end of the world.

The saint whom we commemorate this day, is known to have been one of those whom we call evangelists, one of those inspired to record the events of our Lord's ministry, and associated with Peter, Barnabas, and Paul in the work of the ministry². His subsequent history is obscure. It is not even known where he preached, or whether he died a natural or a violent death. One thing, however, is certain. He was, in more than one sense, "an evangelist;" and we have great reason to bless God for having commissioned him to write his valuable Gospel, and good cause to be thankful for the continuance of an office in the Church, of which the preaching of the Gospel (originally delivered to inspired men) is still a distinguishing feature. True, indeed, it is,—ministers in the present day have not a special revelation. They do not foretell events, or work miracles, or possess extraordinary inspiration, or "understand all mysteries and all knowledge." But they can "do the work of evangelists, and make full proof of their ministry." They can "preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine³." And this, blessed be God, they still do amongst us. They preach the Gospel of the kingdom on every Lord's day. They administer, as need arises or occasion is given, baptism and the Lord's supper. And they teach our children the rudiments of the Gospel. When we are sick, they visit us; when we are in trouble, they comfort us; when we are in any straight or difficulty, they

¹ Acts xxi., 8.

² Acts xii., 25; xv., 39; 2 Tim. iv., 11.

³ 2 Tim. iv., 2, 3, 5.

minister unto us. And whether it is comfort or correction, absolution or instruction they dispense, it is still the comfort and correction, the absolution and instruction of the Gospel¹. It is some portion of the message of Christ,—some word whereby we may be saved.

And what a responsible thing it is to be a hearer of this faithfully-preached Gospel,—what a difficult thing to labour effectually in the vocation of a hearer,—to be a hearer to any purpose! What faith we should have in the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice of him who commissions his ministers to preach! How gladly, how reverently, how attentively should we listen to their godly admonitions, and evince, in our daily lives, the fruits of their ministrations! What changes should be continually going on in the inner man, if the word we hear be true, and they which preach be faithful! Where but in that word do we find judgment recorded against us? Whither but to that word must we fly for hope of deliverance? And if we do not fly thither, what will become of us? And we cannot escape it. “The word which Christ hath spoken will judge us in the last day².” It will be the touchstone by which all our doings will be tried. “Whether we hear or whether we forbear,” the testimony of the word preached, which now preaches peace, pardon, and deliverance, will then be “a terrible voice of most just judgment,” and be heard as our swiftest accuser.

Above all let there be no schism in the body of Christ. Let all the members of his body be one in faith—one in spirit—one in affection—one in holiness—deriving “the effectual working in the measure of every part” from the influences of his Spirit, and reminded—instructed—encouraged therein by the offices of his ministering servants.

SAINT PHILIP AND SAINT JAMES'S DAY.

THE EPISTLE. *St. James i., 1 to 12.*

JAMES, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

3 Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

4 But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all

¹ Acts ii., 38.

² John xii., 48.

men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

10 But the rich, in that he is

made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

The Epistle for this day is a portion of "the General Epistle" of the eminent saint and apostle James, who, together with his fellow-labourer Philip, has been deemed worthy, by the Church, of everlasting remembrance. And it is most refreshing to the weary soul, well nigh overcome with the many and sore discouragements of a present evil world, to revert occasionally to the annals of the Church in her primitive days, and to collect therefrom, as from an inexhaustible spiritual treasure-house, the records of her most eminent disciples, to range at will and at large, among scenes where trials were much more abundant and defections much more uncommon than at present, and to appear to make a somewhat nearer approach to communion with Jesus, by familiarizing ourselves with those who were most often in his company. And there is this greater edification to be derived from the truths delivered by these eminent saints of old, that the truths and themselves were in the very closest accordance, and that the truths were inspired by God.

James, whose words will, on the present occasion, I trust, prove edifying to us, was the son of Alpheus, or Cleophas, and was, with his brother Jude, an original apostle of Christ. He was the first bishop of Jerusalem, and in that capacity pronounced a decree concerning circumcision, which had been referred to the Church for decision by the Christians of Antioch¹. Philip was also an apostle, having been called to the office very early, and never found faithless to the call. He is recorded to have preached and suffered martyrdom in Asia;

¹ Acts xv., 13. to 21. At the close of the year 52; the year in which he wrote his Epistle, St. James underwent martyrdom at Jerusalem, the city of which he was bishop, and at the hands of those whom he was labouring to convert to Christianity.

but there is no certain record of the manner of his death. He was the instrument of bringing Nathanael first to Jesus. To him the Greeks applied when they desired to see Jesus at the feast¹. He it was to whom our Lord, in order to try his faith, proposed the difficult question, "Whence shall we buy bread, that they may eat?" And he it was to whom he addressed the memorable words, declaratory of his divinity, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father."

The subject on which the Apostle speaks in this portion of his Epistle, is trial, a subject on which, in those days of persecution, an apostle would naturally speak, and a disciple most certainly desire the fullest information and greatest encouragement. In the first place, the people of God are told to "count it all joy, when they fall into divers temptations." It was quite a new thing, and altogether peculiar to the Christian dispensation, to promulgate such a doctrine as this. Hitherto trouble had ever been deemed an evil. Jew and Gentile had equally so regarded it. But the Christian was to be, in every point of view, a new creature, and among other changes was to see temptation in a totally different light. Instead of unwillingly bearing it as a necessary evil, he was gladly to welcome it, even as though it were an enviable source of happiness. Instead of finding it darkness, he was to find it illumination, and illumination on the most important subject on which he could possibly be illuminated, the best, surest, and only method of saving an immortal soul. And Jesus, for whose sake he was to suffer persecution, and to whose cross he was to look for atonement, had already set him an example in this respect, for on account of "the joy that was set before him," he had "endured the cross, despising the shame²." And why was he, contrary to his wont in times past, to "count it all joy when he fell into divers temptations?" Because "patience," that virtue so difficult of attainment, would then "have her perfect work," and the whole soul would become thereby "perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

Secondly, the Apostle furnishes a Christian, who is willing but unable to rejoice in his hour of trial, with the best method of obtaining his object. He tells him that he must pray to God,—and offer his prayer in a right spirit,—and with a faith that neither wavers nor is unstable,—and that if he prays thus, his prayer shall be answered, and all he asks "shall be given

¹ John i., 45, 46.

² John xii., 20, 21, 22.

³ John vi., 5.

⁴ John xiv., 9.

⁵ Heb. xii., 2.

him," but that if he is a waverer in prayer, he shall certainly "not receive any thing of the Lord."

Again, by way of confirming a wavering disciple in faith and patience, the Apostle shows the absolute nothingness in the sight of God of those outward human distinctions of which so much account is taken in the present world. Let "the brother of low degree," he says, "rejoice" in his exaltation as a Christian, "the rich brother," in the humiliation to which his profession, as such, reduces him. And why? Because all outward distinctions are transitory and precarious, withering like the grass, falling like "the flower of it," perishing like "the grace of the fashion of it;" and he alone is truly "blessed," be he of high or of low degree, who in his particular station of life, "endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

Thus the character of Christian patience, the time for exercising it, the method of obtaining it, the blessing belonging to it, are commended, and very forcibly, to our notice. Instead of murmuring and repining, as we too often do, in our hour of trial, may we rather henceforth learn the lesson here taught us, of "counting it all joy." Trial is a proof of love; and hence let joy be the offspring of trial, for there can be no greater source of joy than the evidence of a Saviour's love. It may be repugnant to our nature to "joy in tribulation;" but our nature must be overcome by "the sword of the Spirit," and we must patiently bring forth those "peaceable fruits of righteousness" which are taught in the school of tribulation. And the time for exercising patience is any season of special trial; or, if so blessed an appointment is not ordained for us, any ordinary provocation in daily life. In either of these cases, (and the latter class of cases is of every day occurrence,) the disciple of Christ will have frequent opportunities of proving his patience, of what sort it is, and must show it by restraints of temper, exercises of self-denial, evidences of forbearance and love. The method of obtaining this patience is also set before us. He, from whom every good thing comes, must be besought to grant it to us, but besought in faith. And the Lord, thus faithfully besought, will, for his dear Son's sake, grant us wisdom to discern what is meant by trial, "wisdom which our adversaries can neither gainsay nor resist," "wisdom from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated."

¹ Luke xxi., 15.

² James iii., 17.

And a holy motive and strong encouragement are added, to stimulate us in the good work. And may it have weight with all of us. When patience has had her perfect work, we shall be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." And "when we have been tried," and found faithful, we shall "receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

SAINT BARNABAS THE APOSTLE.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Acts xi.*, 22 to the end.

22 ¶ Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:

26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves

with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

27 ¶ And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cesar.

29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea:

30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Barnabas, the eminent disciple and saint, of whose labours and character some account is given in the Epistle of this day, was not one of our Lord's original and chosen apostles, but in all probability one of the seventy, whom our Lord sent forth in the days of his ministry, to preach and heal the sick¹. His labours in the cause of Christ, from the time his name is first mentioned in Scripture to the time when all mention of him ceases, were most active and unremitting; and doubtless his other labours in the same holy cause, of which no certain record is handed down to us, were equally diligent and steadfast. But it will not be necessary for us, on the present occasion, to derive edification from the whole history of Barnabas, wheresoever contained or howsoever authenticated. It will be

¹ See Dean Stanhope's Paraphrase and Comment on the Epistles and Gospels.

sufficient to look at the few incidents here furnished to us, and we shall derive therefrom abundant edification and instruction in righteousness.

We have first, in this short extract from an inspired writing, a description of Barnabas himself, and secondly, an account of some of his proceedings. And first, what is said of Barnabas himself? "Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." He was a good man, a really good man; a man whose professions and doings accorded; a man in whom was no guile, and whose whole life was devoted, without ostentation or selfish motive, to benevolence and the furtherance of good. He was "full of the Holy Ghost;" and from this fountain of goodness, this "Author and Giver of good things," he derived all his goodness, all his power, all his will to carry on the work of grace in his own heart, and to extend it in the world. He was "full of faith," of that faith which gives the first impulse to a holy life—which "works by love"—which depends on Christ for justification and atonement—which orders the whole conversation—and has the chief conversation in heaven. Such was the goodness, the spirituality, the faith of the Apostle Barnabas, and he bids us go and do likewise. We are disciples of the same master—professors of the same faith—inheritors of the same obligations—although placed in different circumstances. Can that be said of all of us, in our various relations, which has been said of Barnabas? Are we "good men," "full of the Holy Ghost and of faith," in any of the senses in which it is affirmed of him? Are we in the constant habit and practice of doing good from the purest motives? Are we influenced, in all that we think, do, or say, not in a miraculous but in a natural way, by an inward operation of the Holy Ghost? Are we well supplied, abundantly furnished, frequently replenished, with faith,—faith which depends on Jesus, comes of the Spirit, and brings forth fruit? These are questions more easily asked than answered. Let us take time to answer them,—put them often,—and in the most searching manner we can, to our own hearts,—pray over them,—give ourselves wholly to them,—that eventually "our profiting may appear to all."

Secondly, we have in this short extract from an inspired writing, an account of some of the proceedings of Barnabas. These, as they will substantiate the truth of the character ascribed to him, as well as store our minds with interesting facts

¹ Gal. v., 6.

appertaining to religion, cannot but prove edifying. The incident with which the Epistle opens is the mission of Barnabas. He was sent to settle a church which had already congregated at Antioch, a place of great note in the primitive times as a scene of successful labour, and a place justly celebrated as the station wherein the name of Christian first became the distinctive appellation of the family of Christ. And no sooner had Barnabas arrived at Antioch, than he began to fulfil his mission. When "he had seen the grace of God" already evinced in so remarkable a manner, "he was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord." "And much people was added to the Lord." And here we may note two points of importance. It is of no use to believe and to turn unto the Lord, unless "with purpose of heart" we "cleave" unto him, and as he emphatically says himself, "continue in his word". Vain is profession without practice; vain is purpose of tongue without "purpose of heart;" vain is it to call on the Lord, unless we "cleave" to him. And again, it is important to remember that the fruit of the ministry ought especially to abound, where, as in the case of Barnabas at Antioch, the exhortation of the minister is seconded by his example. And wheresoever such is, to any extent, the case, the condemnation of unfruitful professors, the judgment on nominal believers, will necessarily be the greater.

Further, the zeal of Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch, and they were engaged there conjointly, for a whole year, in the high and holy vocation of "assembling themselves with the church, and teaching much people." And here we may infer the debt of gratitude due to a zealous minister from every member of his congregation, and the serious responsibility incurred by every member of a congregation thus zealously ministered unto. And how is the debt of gratitude to be repaid? How is the serious responsibility to be acknowledged? Only by a diligent attendance on the ministrations of the minister. Only by a conformity of the life to the model exhibited, a faithful portraiture, in the daily conversation, of the daily teaching, and an humble but fervent desire to show the first-fruits of conversion and discipleship in our own home and dwelling.

Lastly, Barnabas, in conjunction with Saul, was the bearer of relief from the Christians of Antioch to "the brethren which dwelt in Judæa." In almost every thing that we have need

¹ John viii., 31.

of, be it even of a worldly and temporal kind, it is still our privilege to be permitted to look to our ministers, who as treasurers and almoners for others, or as dispensers of their own bounty, are ever ready to serve us. And to none may we more confidently entrust the distribution and management of private bounties or public charities, for "with good-will they will do their service, as unto the Lord and not unto men."

And we must not forget, finally, that the relief sent to the Christians of Judæa was the gift of the Christians of Antioch. The Church at Jerusalem held out the right hand of fellowship to the Church at Antioch in spiritual things, and the Church at Antioch failed not to make its liberal return in carnal things. And thus the Christians of Antioch proved that they not only called themselves, but were Christians, and that they took that high and honourable title, as doers of the word and not hearers only,—as men who "loved not merely in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth¹,"—as men in whom, through the excellency and power of a spiritually-engrafted faith, "the world" was literally "crucified unto them, and they unto the world²." And shall not we, in our little sphere and circle, glory in doing likewise? Shall we not, and may we not, as opportunity offers, spend and be spent for our brethren in works of charity—freely administer of our power to the wants of their souls or bodies,—and, as those who inherit an ancient name from honourable ancestors do their utmost to hand it down to their descendants unsullied, so make it the whole object of our life and faith to do nothing "contrary to the name of Jesus," but to exalt it and magnify it at all times, whether by life or death? Such be the aim of us all, the chief glory of us all, the absorbing desire, in prayer and privacy, of us all; and if the honour of our spiritual Father's name be as yet not thus dear to us, may a change for the better be a result of our present meditation, a change wrought by the Spirit, and made fruitful in every good work.

¹ 1 John iii., 18.

² Gal. vi., 14.

SAINT JOHN BAPTIST'S DAY.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Isai. xl., 1 to 11.*

COMFORT ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem; and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high-way for our God.

4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.

5 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

6 The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field.

7 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.

8 The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

9 O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain: O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid: say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God.

10 Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

11 He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

If the sins of God's ancient people had been great, so also were their trials. Oftentimes were they harassed by their enemies, their land was laid waste, their cities destroyed, their sons and their daughters carried into captivity. One great captivity in particular,—the Babylonish captivity,—was specially predicted, and eventually came to pass; and the disgrace as well as misery of it, and the duration as well as the disgrace, filled up to the full the cup of Israel's troubles. In order, however, as much as possible to mitigate the present and apprehended trials of his chosen but rebellious people, the Lord here commands his prophets, (not Isaiah only, but all his prophets,) to "comfort his people, to speak comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, and her iniquity pardoned," because she has "received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

And behold suddenly the scene, as it were by anticipation, is transferred to the times immediately antecedent to the fulfilment of the prophecy, and a voice is heard announcing the advent of the Lord himself, and bidding his people prepare to

meet him. "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." If these words had not been expressly applied in the New Testament to a particular person, event, and circumstance in its history, their actual import might have seemed dubious. But as it is quite certain that the New Testament, in many places¹, declares them to be applicable to the office of the Baptist, and his particular mission and message, there can be no doubt upon the subject, and we must recognise their applicability to the present festival. He who is here spoken of as "crying in the wilderness," was undoubtedly that very John the Baptist, who, according to the Collect, was "as at this time wonderfully born," and sent beforehand to prepare the minds of men for a coming Messiah.

The New Testament gives an account of his birth, mode of life, preaching, and personal character, all of which were of a very striking kind; and concludes its notices by narrating his death, which was brought about by the jealousy and malice of a vindictive woman. The principal feature in his life, however, with which we, on this particular occasion, have to do, is its missionary feature. He was sent before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, and he fulfilled his mission by enjoining "all men every where to repent," and requiring them, in token of their repentance, to come to his baptism. And why was this the best mode of preparing a wicked world for its Messiah? Because it tended to remove the stumbling-blocks that stood in the way of change, and must have had the effect, if universally heeded, of bringing all men to the feet of the Saviour, and showing them the real purpose of his advent. And what were the stumbling-blocks to be removed—the obstacles to be surmounted—the difficulties to be got rid of,—before a sinful and corrupt generation could be at all qualified to receive a Saviour, or make straight, in an evil heart, a highway for a holy God? Prejudice and ignorance were to be enlightened—a perverted imagination was to be brought to know itself, a hardened heart was to be softened, a proud spirit to be

¹ Compare Matt. iii., 1—4, with Mark i., 3; Luke i., 76; iii., 2—5;

humbled, a lowly temper to be exalted, a way of sin to be forsaken, a wilfulness of unbelief to be done away. And then might a Saviour, who could alone save, exalt, enlighten, and atone, break up the prepared ground, and find a path made ready for him. The Baptist worked his work, but the fruit repaid not the labour. Some, perhaps many, so far profited by his teaching as to learn his lesson of repentance, and turn their thoughts to Christ. But doubtless the great majority of his hearers went away unconvinced, and suffered not "the rough places" of their hearts to be "made plain." Still, as we said before, the Baptist, so far as he was concerned, fulfilled his office,—and then gave place to his successor.

And behold the Lord God our Messiah, he, for whom a way was thus prepared, and a herald sent before to make reception, coming, as he was prefigured to come, in power and mercy,—in power to save or punish,—in power and mercy to save. "Behold the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him, behold his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead these that are with young." There is still a herald giving warning; there is still a Messiah to come; and there is still a preparation to be made, even the preparation of repentance. In season, out of season, the minister of Christ gives warning; and the motive on which he bases the warning is the doctrine of a Messiah to come. And what does he tell us to do in anticipation of that coming? He tells us to "repent, and believe the Gospel¹." He tells us to repent, and not to swerve from our repentance; to believe, and not to be content with the form of believing. And how much, does he tell us, is involved in a true repentance? How much, does he tell us, is contained in a hearty belief? We must, if we would repent truly, and believe heartily, forsake all carnal desires, all worldly preferences, all selfish aims, all covetous propensities, all sins whatsoever; and taking them all, in faith, to the feet of the cross, bring every thought connected with them into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and "present our bodies, from henceforth, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service²."

And this we must do, not now only, but always—not occasionally only, but perpetually,—and walk in these new ways so

¹ Mark i., 15.

² Rom. xii., 1.

heartily, so stedfastly, so evidently, that not only God shall see the change, but man, which looketh on the appearance and judgeth severely. And since none can come unto God in this humble, believing, and penitent way, of themselves, but only through his Spirit—since none who have begun so good a work can continue it without his continued heavenly furtherance—there must be prayer in the beginning, prayer in the progress, prayer without ceasing unto the end for that never-failing supply of grace, which shall more than balance never-failing infirmities.

And let us look to the glorious motive which should stir us up to faith, to repentance, and to prayer, and keep us in the same; even the approach of a coming Messiah. That Messiah is powerful and merciful, powerful to save or punish, powerful and merciful to save. "His reward is with him," for he is powerful to save through his own ever-purifying blood. And "his work is before him," for he is powerful to punish, as man's divine, omnipotent, everliving judge. And he "feeds his flock like a shepherd" both here and ever, here with grace, and ever with glory; here affording them care and protection, and in an everlasting world placing them in sure dwellings, peaceable pastures, and quiet resting-places. Here with a strong hand and mighty arm, "he carries the lambs" of his flock, and hereafter with infinite love and gracious all-sufficiency, "gathers them" in one heavenly fold. Here he bears the infirmities of the weak—mitigates their sorrows—and gently turns their steps, where there is promise of good, to his own fountain of health. And in another world he opens an everlasting door of comfort and happiness, and admits through its portals to his own presence in glory, all, without exception or distinction, who have "heard his voice and followed him¹." Now is the time to appreciate so constraining a motive. Now is the time to "repent and believe the Gospel." The Saviour will soon come; his kingdom is at hand; his judgment approaches; his herald gives warning; he is waiting, nay, longing to be gracious. Let us flee to the arms of his mercy; let us flee from the wrath to come.

¹ John x., 27.

SAINT PETER'S DAY.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Acts xii., 1 to 11.*

ABOUT that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.

2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)

4 And when he had apprehended him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.

7 And, behold the angel of the Lord came upon *him*, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote

Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from *his* hands.

8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

9 And he went out and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and *from* all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

A very remarkable incident in the life of Peter is the subject-matter of the Epistle appointed for this day. Herod, the king of Judæa, one of the greatest enemies Christianity ever had, put "James the brother of John" to death, and with the same intent "proceeded further to take Peter also." Peter having been thus apprehended, was kept in prison, and was to have been executed, possibly without any form of trial, when the passover, then in course of celebration, should be over. This intention, however, apparently so easy of fulfilment, was not at that time to be carried into effect, for the Lord Jesus had purposed to show Peter a special mark of favour, and to reserve him for other labours in his cause. And hence the prayers of the Church were heard, and "the Lord sent his angel, who delivered the Apostle out of the hand of Herod, and from all the

expectation of the people of the Jews." As soon as the angel called to him, "his chains fell off from his hands," and when "they reached the iron gate that led into the city, it opened unto them of its own accord," the soldiers that guarded him not awaking, and the keepers that kept the door of the prison, and the enemies of the Saviour without, not taking any heed.

Dismissing nothing from our thoughts, in this short account of so great a deliverance, that can at all conduce to edification, let us first observe the conduct of Herod. Seeing that the execution of James the brother of John had "pleased the Jews," he "proceeded farther to take Peter also." Thus, in addition to the act of malicious wickedness in taking Peter, we are constrained to recognise the twofold evil motive, of a wish to injure the Church, and a desire to please the people. Observe the varied promptings of "an evil heart of unbelief" here exemplified. In Herod a naturally evil heart and a radically cruel disposition appear to have been united. And these two elements of iniquity mutually aided and excited one another. An evil heart was the prompter of the evil, and a cruel disposition was the agent in the work. An evil heart devised the evil device of persecuting the Church, and a cruel disposition carried it into effect in a cruel manner, even by imprisonment, violence, and bloodshed. And Herod possessed power, which his evil heart could turn whithersoever it would. Unrestrained by earthly opposition, he could be moved from his purpose by none but heavenly. There could not be two things more contrary the one to the other than the evil which Herod practised, and the Gospel which Peter preached; and like Saul, he was "able to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth¹," and if it had been within the compass of his power, he would have exterminated it altogether. Another agent of mischief in the heart of Herod was, his desire to "please the people." Being a worldly-minded as well as radically evil man, he had no object to serve but a worldly object, and this he served most effectually when he "pleased the people." The people, in return, gave him their applause, and in obtaining this he had what he desired, his reward. We thus see that an evil heart is the source of evil—that it steadily pursues its single object—engages in its service every congenial propensity,—and in the prosecution of its darkly-laid designs, opposes even God and religion. Let us then "keep our heart with all diligence, since out of it are the issues of life²."

¹ Acts xxvi, 8.

² Prov. iv, 23.

"If we now please men, we are not the servants of Christ," and it is impossible to serve "God and Mammon".

But it must not be forgotten, that while Herod was plotting against Peter, the Church was interceding for his safety. Intercessory prayer is a duty, and particularly for our brethren under trial. Even the true disciple of Jesus may be placed in difficulty. Even the right-minded minister of Christ may be exposed to temptation. And who can escape the bodily infirmity of sickness, of sickness which may be even unto death? In these or any other emergencies, whether of body or soul, it will be an exercise of true charity to make intercession—a proof of love to desire restoration. And might not intercessory prayer be made a good test of our feelings towards a fellow-Christian, whenever we had reason to suspect ourselves of being at enmity with him? If faith be the essence of the prayer, and charity dictates its use, how great is the good it may do, how unanswerable the test it will afford! Even if it be not successful, he who has offered it has proved his own self. And if successful, he who has made the prayer, and he for whom it has been made, have alike been benefited.

But behold, further, the prayer is answered, for deliverance comes. The Lord Jesus is faithful, and will not suffer his approved servant to be removed out of the world, as long as he can do any good in it. And he will contrive ways and means of escape, even if these ways and means be extraordinary, in his own good time and manner. But must we not be his servants, if we would be thus favoured? Must we not be his followers in faith and patience? Must we not be striving, night and day, to extend his kingdom in our own hearts, and in the hearts of those around us? In that case, although not on account of our own works or deservings, he will make a way for us to escape, even out of the most imminent danger. Not perhaps miraculously, but in some other very wonderful way, will he contrive a mode of deliverance, which men could not have thought of. Only let us be in reality faithful disciples; only let us "provide for our own, and especially for those of our own house", all needful edification; only let our habitation be the habitation of the just, and our goings out and comings in the goings out and comings in of Christians,—and then for the Lord's greater glory and for his people's more abundant profit, he will send us peace and safety in the midst of apparent destruction. And how exciting an encouragement is this to a steadfast continuance in a

¹ Gal. i., 10.

² Luke xvi., 13.

³ 1 Tim. v.

good way, that the Lord has actually promised the reward! "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come¹."

But, further, we are taught in this brief but striking narrative, to "pray without ceasing²," and to work with him who hears the prayer. The Church interceded without ceasing for Peter. And Peter, when a miraculous operation had delivered him, made use of the means put into his hands. Let this, in every emergency, be the course we take. If a brother or sister be in danger of death, or of final impenitence, let our prayer not only be faithful, but unremitting. Not presuming so greatly on our merits as to think that the moment we ask we must receive, let us rather fear that our demerits may harm the cause we desire to serve; let us importune the Lord daily for grace to make our prayers and our lives correspond, and deem it a most fitting exercise of our faith and patience to have waited long and pleaded often, until it has pleased the Lord to hear us. And when the Lord has been graciously pleased to help us out of any difficulty, whether of body or soul, let us acknowledge the obligation not only with thanksgiving, but by co-operation with him who has accomplished the mighty deliverance, deeming it a high honour to be "labourers together with God³," and "working out our own salvation" for the future "with fear and trembling," because God has already "worked in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure⁴." To this end let us strive to become by faith, by patience, by self-denial, by brotherly-kindness, approved disciples of Jesus—and then we shall be of the number of those whose prayer shall be heard for others, and for whom others shall pray with success, and especially of the number of those, whom the Redeemer, in every time of trial, shall succour and befriend, and even in the valley of the shadow of death, shall comfort with the comfort of God.

¹ 1 Tim. iv., 8.

² 1 Cor. iii., 9.

³ 1 Thess. v., 17.

⁴ Philip. ii., 13.

SAINT JAMES THE APOSTLE.

FOR THE EPISTLE: *Acts xi*, 27 to the end, and *xii*, 1 to 3.

27 In these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world; which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cesar.

29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea:

30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.

2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also.

The chief incident on which the interest of this portion of Scripture rests, is the martyrdom of James; but before it is made to "minister godly edifying," it will not be out of place to turn to some spiritual account another incident here recorded illustrative of the practical working of love, as well as one or two particulars pertaining to the Apostle whose death we commemorate. In the midst of all the persecutions and distresses with which Christ's faithful people were in former times surrounded, they never forgot the temporal wants of those whom they loved as brethren. A grievous famine had been predicted by one of their own prophets, named Agabus, and they determined, by making a collection among themselves, to provide for their necessity by anticipation, and to send the contribution into Judæa where it would be most needed. This was done accordingly, and every man, "according to his ability," readily came forward to minister to his poorer brethren. Every disciple of Christ professes as much, because, as a disciple of Christ, he binds himself to an habitual observance of every command of Christ, and he cannot be ignorant of an obligation thus self-imposed and universally binding. But profession is, as we well know, not practice; and by its fruits must it be tried. Does the trial of profession, whenever the opportunity presents itself, bring forth practice? Does faith, on every such occasion, work by love? Does love invariably work by self-denial? Does self-denial, not grudgingly or of necessity but cheerfully, take treasure from the heap, and give to him that needeth? And does he that needeth ever go away in the same state of want in which he came?

The sword is no longer the weapon that assails Christianity. The stake is no longer the trial that tries the faithful disciple.

There is not that constant presence of imminent danger, that constant danger of violent death, which in former times absorbed every other emotion, and left little room for thoughts of others. Those days, happily, are now past, and we "dwell," comparatively, "in a peaceable habitation and in sure dwellings and in quiet resting-places¹." Time may now be found—thoughts spared—resources husbanded for deeds of charity,—and truly blessed is he, who, not content with high-sounding professions, goes forth continually on his errand of good, and does what he can for all men. In his own house, in his own neighbourhood, among his brethren of the village or place where he dwells, he finds ample field for exertion, and even if he can do but little, he does that little with a good will. And where is he who can do nothing? He is not to be found. Money is not the only minister of good, for much that is above all price, and that money cannot purchase, may be done for the good of others. Comfort, peace-making, kind offices, counsel, instruction, tender mercies, these are the charities which may be ministered by him who is poor in possessions but rich in faith, and by the ministration of which in due season, he will, although poor, make many rich. And thus does practice adorn profession—thus does love illustrate faith—thus does activity in working show peace in believing. And the same blessed Spirit still works the work in the believer,—and the same gracious Master regards the work, although done unto the least of his servants, as done unto him.

The Apostle, to the account of whose death, the edifying incident, thus spiritualized, is in our Epistle made the preface, was, with his brother John the Evangelist, the son of Zebedee, and a fisherman. He was called early to the ministry, and continued in close attendance on our Lord in his office of apostle until the time, "when all the disciples forsook him and fled²." His mother, Salome, was also an occasional attendant on our Lord's ministry, and was present, with our Lord's mother, to whom she was related, at his crucifixion. James himself was probably one of our Lord's most favoured disciples, for we find him, with his brother John and Peter, our Lord's chosen companion at the raising of Jairus' daughter³, at the transfiguration⁴, and in Gethsemane⁵. And farther and finally, he was so far honoured as an apostle of Christ, as to have been the first to suffer death in his cause, thus, although not obtaining the very highest place in

¹ Isai. xxxii., 18.² Matt. xxvi., 56.³ Luke viii., 51.⁴ Matt. xvi., 1, 2.⁵ Mark xiv., 33.

the realms of glory, as his mother had desired¹, obtaining a sort of honourable precedence in his entrance into everlasting habitations. Having been the first of the apostles to fall a sacrifice to the fury and worldly policy of Herod Agrippa, James the son of Zebedee was doubtless a very zealous preacher of the Gospel, and a very successful labourer in the cause of Christ. History, inspired or uninspired, gives us no insight into his labours or proceedings after Christ's ascension; but the fact of his early martyrdom is a most eloquent voice in his favour, and affords most abundant testimony of his diligence in preaching the Gospel of the kingdom. Such as he was, he is now before us. It is his death that we commemorate, and "he being dead yet speaketh²."

And what does his death teach us? To be very diligent in "setting our affections on things above, not on things on the earth³;" to be very diligent, when we have been ourselves converted, in strengthening our brethren; and very courageous in prosecuting all our works begun, continued, and ended in the Lord, and not suffering any worldly ridicule or bodily suffering to "move us away from the hope of the Gospel⁴." And, above all, the martyrdom of James preaches repentance and conversion to the hardened sinner. It warns him to die unto sin, since bodily death may come. It warns him, that although he may not die a violent death, certainly not a violent death for Christ's sake and the Gospel's, he may possibly die suddenly. And whither will he go, dying suddenly, if he dies in sin? Whither but to the place of sinners, the place from whence he cannot return, the place in which he shall never find peace. Let the sinner, then, the hardened sinner, warned, in the death of James, of the death of all men, give heed to the words of life. Let him depart from the error of his way, and receive the engrafted word. Let him give himself an opportunity of hearing the truth, and perchance a ray of its divine light may win its way to his soul. Let him approach the sacred flame of the Gospel, and perchance a spark from it may fall on his evil conscience. And if this does happen, may he be converted and live! And may he so repent and amend, that, whether he is called suddenly or slowly, he may be prepared, and "whether he lives or dies, he may be the Lord's⁵."

¹ Matt. xx., 21.² Heb. xi., 4.³ Col. iii., 2.⁴ Col. i., 23.⁵ Rom. xiv., 8.

SAINT BARTHOLOMEW'S DAY.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Acts v., 12 to 16.:*

12 ¶ By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women;)

15 Insomuch that they brought

forth the sick into the streets, and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

16 There came also a multitude *out* of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

The Epistle for St. Bartholomew's day contains, as we have just seen, an account of the mighty works done by the apostles, and their effect upon the people. Bartholomew, although not expressly named, was doubtless one of those that had his share in the works, and participated in the glory. His name, however, as the worker of a miracle, the teacher of a doctrine, or the doer of any work whatsoever, is not once mentioned in the Gospels, and, if we knew him under no other name than that of Bartholomew, he might seem, individually, unknown to us, indeed the only apostle on record of whom no account has come down to us.

But although he is only named under the name of Bartholomew when all the other apostles are named¹, yet is there good evidence to show, that he was the same person as Nathanael, who is more than once spoken of in St. John's Gospel². It is remarkable, that in that Gospel the name of Bartholomew does not once occur, and that in the other three Gospels the name of Bartholomew occurs, but not that of Nathanael. It is also remarkable, that Philip, who first "brought Nathanael to Jesus," is always coupled with Bartholomew in the catalogue of the apostles, as though they went together on their mission. And it is further remarkable, that when Jesus appeared to the apostles for the third time after the resurrection at the sea of Tiberias, as recorded in St. John's Gospel—his two former appearances having been made to apostles only—Nathanael was

¹ Matt. x., 1. Mark vi., 7. Luke ix., 1.

² John i., 45 to 51; and xxi., 1, 2.

one of those to whom he thus appeared, and all the others present were apostles. Upon the supposition then that Nathanael and Bartholomew are one and the same person, we can conceive none better qualified for the office of an apostle of the guileless Jesus, none in whom the absence of all guile and the presence of much faith gave fairer promise of a profitable ministry. And the annals of Christianity show, that the promise which gave hope in Nathanael, bore fruit in Bartholomew. In India, Lycaonia, Armenia, he is recorded to have preached the Gospel, and to have preached with great success. And all ecclesiastical writers are agreed that he died a violent death, although of the place or manner of his death there is no certain evidence on record¹.

One important inference that may be drawn from this apparent want of clearness in the identity of Bartholomew is, that the truth on which our eternal hopes depend is not a "cunningly devised fable²." There is not that exact accordance in "the measure of every part," which appears in a false but ingeniously told tale. There is no effort to meet objections, no attempt to reconcile difficulties. The history, such as it is, is told, and in so simple a manner, that nothing seems so well fitted to set it off, as its own self-evident truth and intrinsic excellence, and we rise from each perusal of it better, wiser, more confirmed in our faith than ever. Another truth that we gather from this account of Bartholomew is, that, although there is not, to our imperfect understandings, an exact accordance in the measure of every part in the New Testament, it is only in things comparatively unimportant that any sort of difficulty occurs. Thankful, truly thankful should we be to the great Author as well as Finisher of our faith, that he has revealed to us, in the clearest manner, all things necessary to salvation, and left nothing unaccounted for that can at all minister grace or further practice. Another lesson that we learn from this account of Bartholomew is, that whether he was Nathanael or not, he was a faithful preacher of the Gospel. Let us devoutly recognise in the more than human wisdom, which our blessed Lord manifested in the choice of the original ministers of his religion, a strong evidence of his divinity, and rejoice, that in those, the early days of Christianity, he so effectually worked with its preachers, and "confirmed their word with signs following³," that he

¹ Eusebius and Jerome.

² 2 Pet. i., 16.

³ Mark xvi., 20.

established it on such sure foundations, that "the gates of hell have never prevailed against it¹."

It must not, however, be forgotten; that in the events recorded in the Epistle for this day, the apostles at large participated. Goodly, indeed, must have been the spectacle of an accordant ministry and a united Church, as exhibited in those days. Uninfluenced by any of the petty jealousies which disfigure the Church in these times, the defenders of the faith in the primitive ages presented a bold undivided front to its enemies, and convinced the gainsayers, as much by unity of purpose, as by mightiness of operation. May "the multitude of them that believe" be still "of one heart and one soul²," and especially those who meet together in this house for private worship! May they, whatever be the divisions and distractions of the world without, still maintain, both in life and doctrine, a godly uniformity, "continue in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship³," and exhibit in all things, but especially in unity, an example of primitive faithfulness.

But further, the apostles are here stated to have "wrought many signs and wonders among the people," and so to have brought about the very glorious result of "believers being the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." Observe then, first, the wonders and signs wrought. "The sick were brought into the streets," both the sick of Jerusalem, and the sick of the cities round about, and "they were healed every one." God's power was thus made signally manifest in the weakness of his instruments. A few humble fishermen unkinged the course of nature, and did what no other men did,—and the manifest conclusion is, that if these men had not been of God, they could have done nothing. And then came, secondly, the effects. The people magnified the workers of the miracles, and "believers were the more added to the Lord." Men could not but see, that the things so wonderfully done established the divinity of the new religion; and they were contented to receive it as divine. Men could not but feel, that the restoration of their sick and dying to health and life by the wonderful means used, was as much the work of a loving as of a mighty God; and hence they were led to conclude (the emotion of gratitude being the strong predisposing cause) that the same love must reign in all God's dealings with his people.

And what shall we learn from this recital of wonderful cures

¹ Matt. xvi., 18.

² Acts iv., 32.

³ Acts ii., 42.

performed by the apostles? Can the sick still expect to be cured by miracles? Can the ministers of Christ still work miracles upon the bodies of men? No, indeed. The power to work miracles no longer exists, and the people must not now expect that any but ordinary means will avail for their bodily restoration. But, thanks be to God, we are sure, in and through Christ, that the sick in soul may be healed, and the healed in soul show their spiritual health and strength in works of charity. Like the sick in the days of the apostles, they may be brought, nay they may come of themselves to the fountain of health, and all the diseases of their souls will be healed. And the ministers of Christ are continually bidding them, in the name of their Master, to "rise up and walk¹," continually telling them words by which they and their families may be saved. Oh may we all come more freely, more readily, more unreservedly than we do unto him, through whom we may be healed! May we have grace to see and know, that we are frail, dying creatures,—not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves,—weak in faith,—unwilling to repent,—and deriving all our power to do any thing well from that blessed and only Saviour, who, in the day of the resurrection, will perform that most stupendous miracle of "changing our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself²."

SAINT MATTHEW THE APOSTLE.

THE EPISTLE. 2 Cor. iv., 1 to 6.

THEREFORE seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them

which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

¹ Acts iii., 6.² Philip. iii., 21.

The compilers of our liturgy have taken the fitting opportunity of St. Matthew's day, to set before churchmen, in a scriptural form, the excellency of the ministerial office,—its nature—power—subject—operation—and author. Matthew was both an apostle and evangelist, and so, in a double capacity, a minister of Christ, and a most fitting representative, in that double capacity, of the character of the ministerial office. To record as well as to preach Christianity,—to preserve as well as to inculcate truth,—to hand down to a future as well as unfold to a present generation, the wonders of redeeming love,—was ever the custom of the Church, and originally a work of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew, the earliest of Christian writers, wrote under the immediate guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit; and to him, as in a manner the father of all that write in the cause of Christ, may a writing or preaching minister refer for most venerable authority and sanction¹. And equally to him may all readers of Christian writings look, as their oldest instructor in righteousness, and their most ancient authority for doctrine. And there cannot possibly be Christian books more instructive, more admonitory, more edifying than those which are founded on such a model, and exhibit to us, in the sober garb of truth, and with the unerring pen of inspiration, the life of Christ, which in baptism we undertake to imitate; that life which is the most eloquent expounder of Christian doctrine, and shows, in vivid portraiture, what we ought to be in thought, word, and deed, in order to be perfect. And there cannot be a more seasonable occasion than the present of convincing ourselves, that a Christian's spare time is much more appropriately spent in reading books that may minister to his soul's health, than in giving attention to "the profane and vain babblings" of books of entertainment. The main obligation of the minister, and the first duty of him who is ministered unto, is to make due provision for the immortal soul. This is the one thing needful, and be this ever the thing first heeded by the minister who writes or preaches,—by the disciple who reads or hears.

But we must now devote ourselves for a short time to a consideration of some of those essential particulars, in which the excellency of the ministerial office is here said to consist. The Apostle intimates, in the first place, that it was the part or office of himself and his fellow-labourers, to preach with courage

¹ St. Matthew's Gospel is supposed to have been written in the year 38. Some place it as late as the year 61 or 62.

and fidelity. "Seeing we have received this ministry," says he, "we faint not, but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." The ministers of the Gospel, those who truly preach Christ, and live by the Christian rule, still execute their office with the courage and fidelity described by the Apostle. We hear them on every Lord's day holding forth the word of life, with the double intent that neither we may "run in vain," nor they "labour in vain." They "speak the word with boldness¹," and "faint not." They tell us, whether we be rich or poor, masters or servants, parents or children, that "the wages of sin is death²," and that the terrors of the Lord, who is no respecter of persons, are inevitably reserved for the ungodly. They hide nothing,—disguise nothing,—misinterpret nothing. Their object is plain and simple, their method straightforward and open. There is no artifice,—no mystification,—no necessity for misapprehension. And why are Christ's ministers thus bold and faithful? Because they have undertaken the most responsible service that man can undertake, the office of winning souls to Christ, and detaching them from the service of Satan. And this they must do, whether men hear or whether they forbear, because the interest at stake is the soul, and the issue, an issue to be solved in eternity.

Let us not, then, feel offended, if, in the due discharge of their solemn trust, our ministers tell us our duty and the consequence of not performing it, with great fidelity. Let us not complain, if, when we are "overtaken with a fault," or what is even still worse, have not yet in all simplicity and truth put on Christ, they tell us, that wrath is gone out against us from the Lord, and that "the end of these things is death³." Let us, on the contrary, conscious alike of the responsibilities of our ministers and of our own awful obligations, hear with meekness, and obey with cheerfulness, implicitly believing what they tell us, and receiving them in their high character of "ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God⁴."

But this consideration assumes a still more serious aspect when it is remembered, further and secondly, that the responsibility of a Christian minister only goes up to a certain point, and then ceases. If the minister does all he can, and his minis-

Acts iv., 31.

¹ Rom. vi., 23.² Rom. vi., 21.⁴ 1 Cor. iv., 1.

trations fail, the Apostle declares plainly, that the consequences will thenceforth be visited on the disobedient and impenitent hearer. "But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Thus does it too clearly appear, that ignorance and unbelief, wherever they exist, are invariably a result of our own weakness or wilfulness, and that the Gospel, faithfully preached, can only be ineffectual through the wilful unbelief or confirmed impenitence of those that hear it.

But again, the substance of a Christian minister's preaching is an absolute warrant of its sufficiency for all purposes of edification. He "preaches not himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and himself our servant for Jesus' sake." It is not his own doctrine that he preaches,—not his own person that he magnifies. He "preaches Christ Jesus the Lord;" he magnifies "Christ Jesus the Lord," and deems himself not only a servant of that greatest and best of Masters, but a servant whose office is most honourable, whose work is the work of winning souls, and of gaining many spiritual accessions to his Master's family. And grace and strength are given him in abundance to enable him to fulfil his obligation, grace which shines in his heart like "the light shining out of darkness," and enables him, by his preaching and living, to enlighten the dark places of the hearts of men, and to "turn many from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God¹." He "preaches Christ Jesus the Lord," and it is "the only name under heaven given to man whereby he may be saved²." He "preaches Christ Jesus the Lord" in all his fulness as a Saviour, Justifier, Mediator, and mighty God. He "preaches Christ Jesus the Lord," who is "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption³" unto him and unto all men. And he "preaches Christ Jesus the Lord," that he is "the way, the truth, and the life, and that none can come unto the Father but by him⁴." And there cannot be a more all-sufficient subject of preaching than this,—a subject that, through its own intrinsic beauty and excellency, does more readily win its way to the heart, and "commend itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God." May Christ have performed this great work in each and all of us this day and in times past, as our several needs have re-

1. ² Acts iv., 12. ³ 1 Cor. i., 30. ⁴ John xiv., 6.

quired! May he have done it more especially and in his most abundant measure this day, and made us know and feel experimentally, our need of him as a Saviour, and our utter inability to save ourselves. And if so good a work has been begun or continued this day in any of us, may it still go on and prosper, the Lord graciously watering what he has planted, and so, through his ministering servant, "making all grace to abound towards us, that we, always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work¹."

SAINT MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Rev. xii., 7 to 12.*

7 There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world; he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the king-

dom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night

11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

Of angels, as of beings not visible, and ministering in a manner altogether secret to us, we can have no certain knowledge, and can understand nothing clearly. And the reason is, that Scripture, our only guide in such matters, says but little on the subject, and except where it speaks of the ministrations of angels in former times, conducts us to no definite conclusions. In the portion of Scripture now under consideration, the same ambiguity prevails. It appears altogether uncertain, whether this description of "a war in heaven" is a record of the past, or a revelation of the future, and also whether the scene of war thus said to be laid in heaven, is really laid in heaven, or in earth. The combatants are said to have been angelic or spiritual, the victory gained to have been gained by the good angels, and the defeat sustained to have been sus-

¹ 2 Cor. ix., 8.

tained by the evil. The result of this spiritual war is also stated. The good angels were victorious and the evil angels suffered defeat, yea, they were even thoroughly routed and totally dispersed, carrying misery, temptation, and confusion in their train, over all the earth. It does not of course transpire, whether the battle of the angels was literally or figuratively carried on, and whether the beings called "Michael and his angels," were really hosts of warring spirits, or only figurative representatives of Christ and his militant Church. All these ambiguities are apparently not to be solved, and will only find their solution in that day, when every other thing that is mysterious will be cleared up, and short-sighted man shall "know even as also he is known¹."

That there are good angels is most manifest; that there are evil angels is also most manifest. That the good angels are mysterious friends and invisible auxiliaries of frail man, is a truth not to be doubted; and that the evil angels are his invisible enemies and most formidable spiritual persecutors, admits not of question. That the good angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them which shall be heirs of salvation," is a doctrine most distinctly promulgated in Scripture²; that the evil angels show their power and enmity in endeavouring to hinder so blessed a work, is, I fear, quite as evident. The work itself is a species of warfare, and until it can be accomplished, is a most difficult work. But weak and impotent as man confessedly is, and strong and unrelenting as most assuredly his enemies are, his friends and defenders are mightier, his banner is the banner of the cross, and his leader to victory is the omnipotent, all-conquering Lamb. And these cheering assurances, blessed be the Lord God of our salvation, are ascertained and impregnable facts. Unlike the mysterious matters of which we have been speaking, these are truths which most materially concern our soul's everlasting peace, and they have, happily, been established on the surest foundations.

And how shall we, who are so deeply concerned in this mysterious question, view it spiritually? First, we are warned to be cautious. "The great dragon, the old serpent called the Devil and Satan," and all the evil spirits his ministers, war against the souls of the saints. They fight and cease not from the fight. They seem to be "angels of light," but they "deceive the whole world." "They have great wrath," and their wrath

¹ 1 Cor. xiii., 12.

² Heb. i., 14.

burns like fire, even like the fire of their torment. As long as we live we are all more or less in their power. We can none of us escape from their temptations. They "keep us in on every side;" they assail us artfully in every form; they will even redouble their efforts when we can almost bid them defiance. The Lord Jesus they hate, and, failing in their power to harm him, they pursue with the bitterest rancour whatsoever he loves, and exert their utmost diligence to destroy whatsoever he would save. To accomplish this object in the surest manner and to the fullest extent—to deprive the Lord's kingdom of subjects—to lessen the number of his elect—to counteract and disappoint, if possible, all his purposes of love and mercy to mankind—this is the unwearied aim of their hellish malice, this the unceasing scope of their fiendish desires. Let us, then, who are bound to the Lord by a solemn covenant, do our best to bring to nought these purposes. Let us buckle on, in all haste, and with due zeal, the whole of the Christian armour; let us seize the ready weapons of the word and prayer; let us stand like watchmen; let us watch with our eyes open, our "loins girded, our lights burning,—and be, in every sense, like men who really watch for their Lord!"

But we should note, secondly, our encouragement. The holy angels are with us; they fight on our side; they minister to our welfare. They keep watch over the paths of the unprotected; they take an interest in the salvation of souls. They rejoice in the repentance of the sinner, and conduct the faithful servant to bliss. What, though we know not the time of their visitations or the manner of their ministrations,—what, though we cannot hear their voice, see their shape, or heed their counsel—yet may we be sure that they are in the habit of doing us great good and useful service, that they are about our bed, about our path, and watchful of all our ways, and in our helpless moments and weakest conditions not far from any of us. And if we know these things and are assured of them, why should we be concerned to know the far less important particulars of the time, the manner, and the specific object of their ministrations? Suffice it rather that we thankfully acknowledge the secret services of these unseen friends, and accept them as great encouragements in our warfare with unseen enemies. Suffice it that we place implicit confidence in the aid thus mysteriously afforded, but at the same time relax not in the least in our

¹ Luke xii., 35.

strivings with sin, or in our labours in the Lord. Yea, rather, let us be the more greatly excited, the more strongly urged, the more warmly moved to "pray without ceasing," "quench not the Spirit¹," and "press forward toward the mark²." Let us be the more ready in the hour of sorrow, of despondency, and of real danger, to be steadfast, patient, unmoveable, nay joyful.

Let us also set before us the holy angels as examples. We are told, that, in ministering to man, they "fulfil God's will,—always do his pleasure,—never fail of hearkening to the voice of his words³." We are told that they are zealous for their God, obedient to his commandments, active in all offices of love and kindness, interested in things done on earth⁴, thankful for things done in heaven⁵. Let us only do God's will on earth as it is done in heaven; let us only praise him here as he is praised there; and then, with the blessing of God, we may set all his enemies at defiance, and rise as much above them as they can rise against us. And behold, above all, the blood of the Lamb is ready to save us, if we will only have faith in it. By this we can persevere,—by this we can resist,—by this we can overcome. By this, if it purifies our hearts and guides our lives, we may at last even triumph over death itself. And when there hath finally "come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ," and "the accuser of our brethren hath been cast out," and the universe hath crumbled into nothing, by this we may stand unharmed in the midst of the overthrow, and enter the heavenly habitation, where "with angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven, we shall for ever laud and magnify the Lord's glorious name, evermore praising him, and saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory, Glory be to thee, O Lord Most High⁶!"

¹ 1 Thess. v., 17, 19.

² Philip. iii., 14.

³ Psalm ciii., 20, 21.

⁴ Luke xv., 10; 1 Pet. i., 12.

⁵ Rev. v., 11; vii., 11.

⁶ Communion Service.

SAINT LUKE THE EVANGELIST.

THE EPISTLE. 2 Tim. iv., 5 to 15.

5 Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith:

8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

9 Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me.

10 For Demas hath forsaken me,

having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.

11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

12 And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus.

13 The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest bring *with thee*, and the books, *but* especially the parchments.

14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:

15 Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.

The exhortation with which this Epistle opens is a brief but expressive summary of the obligations of a Christian minister, and of the duties imposed upon him by his office. Writing evidently in the expectation of immediate martyrdom¹, the Apostle could not but write solemnly and emphatically. And he does so. He tells his fellow-labourer Timothy, and in language most forcible, most earnest, and most awakening, that he must "watch in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of his ministry." And he tells him, that he must thus apply himself, and more faithfully, if possible, than ever, to the discharge of his sacred functions, because "he himself was about to be offered, and the time of his departure was at hand." The Church would presently lose his services, and require increased efficiency and diligence in all her surviving ministers. The Church had found in him one of her chiefest apostles, and could ill afford to lose, at this critical juncture, one who had "the care of all the churches²," unless his place was well supplied. And the Apostle's age, his imprisonment, his active services in the cause of Christ, and the threatening aspect then assumed by the enemies of the Church, all led obviously to the conclusion, that his martyrdom was nigh at

¹ St. Paul's martyrdom is supposed to have taken place in the year of our Lord 65.

² 2 Cor. xi., 28.

hand. Under these peculiar circumstances he appeals to Timothy, and beseeches him to fulfil his ministry with increased zeal and diligence. And in order, doubtless, to impress this important consideration the more forcibly upon him, he desires to confer with him personally, and beseeches him to "do his diligence to come shortly unto him." Having delivered this solemn charge, the Apostle then tells him of a defection he had experienced in the person of Demas—of an accession he needed in the person of Mark—of the departure of Crescens, Titus, and Tychicus to their respective spheres of usefulness,—of the hostility of "Alexander the coppersmith"—and of the presence and continued ministration of Luke, whose festival we commemorate this day.

Luke, whose labours and office as an Evangelist, as an Evangelist in the double sense of writing a Gospel and preaching the same, have led to the selection of this portion of Scripture on the day of his festival, was the companion of Paul in his travels, and a very faithful and efficient fellow-helper in the work given him to do. He is supposed to have been a native of Antioch, and to have been one of the great Apostle's earliest converts in that city. He is also said to have been a physician, and well educated. Of his history and ministry, beyond the inferences which may be drawn from his own and St. Paul's writings, we have no certain knowledge. His Gospel, which, as a composition, is of a high order, and as a history, supplies omissions, and throws light upon circumstances not fully entered into in the other Gospels, affords positive and perpetual proof of high ministerial qualifications. And the book entitled "The Acts of the Apostles" is not only an invaluable record of the fulfilment of our Lord's promises, and of the advancement and diffusion of the Gospel, but an indirect testimony to the Evangelist's own diligence and labour. "Hence his praise is certainly," as the Apostle says, "in the Gospel." Indeed, the appropriation of the passage now under consideration to the service of the day, is, in itself, no slight token of commendation on the part of the compilers of our liturgy, inasmuch as it contains the Apostle's summary of qualifications for that office, of which he had already found, by experience, in Luke, a most sufficient and satisfactory exemplification. Beyond the pages of holy writ we find small trace of Luke's history; and of the time, place, or manner of his death, even conjecture scarcely ventures to speak; but the Apostle's exhortation, in the first place, and his mention of Luke, in the second, will fur-

nish a sufficient groundwork of wholesome edification, appropriate to the present festival.

In the first place, the Apostle exhorts Timothy to "watch in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of his ministry¹." But it must not be forgotten by us that the due and faithful discharge of these sacred obligations, binding as it is on the minister, brings corresponding obligations on the people. The minister who "watches in all things," is "instant in season, out of season,"—is ever on the look out for opportunities of usefulness—never remiss in his work. The minister who "endures afflictions" is, under all circumstances of adversity or trial, an example and preacher of patience. The minister who "does the work of an evangelist," is zealous, orthodox, and circumspect in preaching the Gospel, in telling the people of their sins, in guiding the people to their Saviour. The minister who "makes full proof of his ministry," devotes himself to frequent ministrations in the houses and families of his people, and alike to the sick, to the healthy, and to the indifferent, offers, nay presses his service.

And what should we be who are thus ministered unto? Should we not be a hearing and a doing people? Should we not live "as becometh the Gospel" thus preached to us? Should we not watch for our own souls? Should we not strive to practise and exemplify patience? Should we not, as the Apostle speaks in another place, "lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth most easily beset us²," and come in all humility and confidence, in all thankfulness and penitence, to the feet of a forgiving Saviour? Should we not be diligent in hearing, discerning, considering, remembering the word preached, and in heeding it thus diligently, whether it be preached in the sick chamber, or in the unoccupied hour of health, in the walk by the way, or in the sanctuary of the living God? Must not the watchfulness of the minister be an argument for the soul's watchfulness? Must not the patience preached be the patience practised? Must not "the work of the evangelist" be found in a joyful, faithful, and substantial reception of the good tidings? Must not "the full proof" of the minister be found in the good fruits of the people? Surely of the one, as of the other, it must be said, "By their fruits ye shall know them³." Surely of the

¹ 2 Cor. viii., 18, 19. 2 Tim. iv., 11. Acts xvi., 10.

² Heb. xii., 1.

³ Matt. vii., 16.

one, as of the other, it must be said, "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman."¹

But further and finally, Paul informs us, that when he thus admonished Timothy, "Luke only was with him." Christians should be a reading people. Christians should be a thinking people. Let "Luke be with them also" in spirit, and his Gospel, and "Acts of the Apostles," become their frequent meditation, and habitual study. Here they will see the life of Christ portrayed; here they will read his sufferings; here they will find recorded his atonement on the cross. And in "the Acts of the Apostles" the rise and increase of the infant Church, the extraordinary descent of the Holy Ghost, the mighty works done by the Apostles, the gradual fulfilment of prophecies and promises, the sufferings and triumphs of the Lord's adopted people, are all, in turn, respectively set forth, and with the greatest fidelity and truth. May we, then, for the future, at all convenient seasons, be a reading and a thinking people. Let every day find us occupied with the things which concern our peace, even if the time spent in so wholesome a study be of necessity short. It is impossible to tell what even a few words thus seasonably read, may bring forth—what good may arise now—what godliness may spring forth in the time to come. Watered with "the dew of God's blessing," spiritualized by faith, visited with much light and heat from the sun which shines in the Scriptures, seed will soon be sown; seed sown will soon ripen, and, carefully nurtured by holy thoughts and regular self-communion, will duly advance toward perfection. Having "given attendance unto reading," having "meditated" on what we have read, having "given ourselves wholly to it," our "profit will appear to all".²

¹ Ezek. iii. 17.

² 1 Tim. iv., 13, 15.

SAINT SIMON AND SAINT JUDE, APOSTLES.

THE EPISTLE. *St. Jude*, 1 to 8.

JUDE, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, *and* called :

2 Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.

3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

5 I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

7 Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

8 Likewise also these *filthy* dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

Both Simon and Jude, the saints in whose honour this day is kept, were apostles, and also, as the evangelist describes them, brethren of our Lord¹. Simon is called indifferently by the evangelist, "Zelotes," and "the Canaanite," both which words (the one in Greek, the other in Hebrew) signify "zealous." Jude is also described under the additional distinctive appellations of "Lebbæus" and "Thaddæus." Lebba² was a town in Galilee, in which this Apostle might possibly have been born. The names "Jude" or "Judas," and "Thaddæus," both signify in the Hebrew, "praise." Surnames were not uncommon among the Jews, and it was a matter of some importance that it should be known in all future ages of the Church, that our Apostle was not Iscariot³.

Both these apostles preached the Gospel in various parts of Asia and Africa, but of their deaths the accounts are very uncertain. Jude, under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost, wrote the Catholic Epistle which bears his name; and as a portion of it has been appointed for the Epistle of this day, it may now be made "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for cor-

¹ Matt. xiii., 55. Mark vi., 3; also compare verse 1 with Gal. i., 19.

² John xiv., 22.

rection, for instruction in righteousness'.¹ Simon not having left behind him any written record of Christian doctrine, and nothing remaining of his history except that which has been already mentioned, we can only say of him, in general terms, that he is one of those old saints of highest note in the primitive Church, to whom great gratitude must ever be due from its members in all ages, for the part he took in laying its foundations, "stretching forth its curtains," and giving it the form and character it at present possesses. Jude's chief record in the New Testament, in his individual capacity, is his Catholic Epistle. He addressed indeed a question to our Lord, which indicates a mind thirsting for knowledge of the best kind; and to this he received an answer, which affords us a fuller insight into the doctrine of spiritual influence, than might otherwise have been afforded². But as this portion of Scripture is not now under consideration, we will not take further notice of it, but rather proceed at once to an examination of those features in the Epistle for the day, which attract our first attention, and claim our highest reverence.

The Apostle tells those to whom he writes, first, that they should "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints," secondly, that "certain men had crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God and the Lord Jesus Christ," and thirdly, that there have been examples in former times of "the destruction of them that believed not."

First, the Apostle tells those to whom he writes, that they should "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." "The faith once delivered to the saints," is the faith of the Church, the doctrine originally delivered by our Lord and his apostles to the faithful, and contained in the word of God. To "contend" for this faith, is, of course, to defend it against those who would impugn it—to assert it with the greatest boldness, "in season, out of season,"—and whatever be the opposition, whatever the zeal, whatever the craft, whatever the ingenuity that assails it, to be at least equally sincere, zealous, and resolute in its defence. The exhortation which we are now considering implies, as plainly as the declaration that follows it asserts, that "the common salvation," or "faith once delivered to the saints," had been often spoken against, even in the apostolic times;

¹ 2 Tim. iii., 16.

² John xiv., 22, 23.

and experience must convince us, that the same hostility to it prevails now, and must be met, as before, by the same opposition. We must all know the articles of our common faith, the doctrines of repentance, faith, holiness, human corruption, atonement by Christ, spiritual influence, judgment, eternity, resurrection from the dead. We must all know these doctrines, and however imperfectly we conform to them in our practice, must firmly believe them in theory. We all hope finally to attain that "common salvation," to which a knowledge and faithful practice of these doctrines minister, and experimentally and sensibly does the really faithful Christian, he, who, as the Apostle speaks, is "sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called," bear testimony to their truth and influence. When an assault is openly made upon these, the first rudiments of his faith, by infidelity and vice, let him who believes in theory begin to believe in practice, and let him defend that "common salvation" by his life, his strivings against sin, his arguments in all companies, the existence of which, as a doctrine, he sees to be in danger.

The sinful life of every evil-doer professing Christianity, is, in the hands of the infidel, an argument against his religion, and as long as any man who professes to believe continues in sin, he seriously endangers his faith, and gives great power to the infidel. His own salvation is in danger, and he brings "the common salvation" into disrepute. And "wherefore should the heathen say of him, where is his God?" So also let the holy, humble, spiritually-minded believer, step forth from his modest retirement in the hour of danger, and boldly assert by his words what he so eloquently defends in his life. Zealous for his God—glorying in his name of Christian—true to his only Saviour—indignant at the attempt to dishonour him—let him lift up his voice in defence of what he loves, and not fear what man can do unto him. By book, by conversation, by example, by persuasion, let him strive to "convert the sinner from the error of his way,"—let him boldly rebuke vice—let him powerfully refute the infidel—and the Lord, in whose cause he strives, will most assuredly give him the victory.

Further, to be prepared for our enemies, the enemies of our souls, "of the cross of Christ," and of "the common salvation," we should know what they are about. Their weapons are what they were in the days of Jude. "They turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and deny the only Lord God, and our

¹ Psalm LXXIX., 10.

Lord Jesus Christ." And how do they do this? And who are they that do it? The doers of this great evil are abroad in every corner of the land, and "by good words and fair speeches" so artfully disguise their poisonous blasphemies, that they "deceive the hearts of the simple¹." Under the specious pretence of reforming, as they call it, our social system, they collect multitudes together, and teach them, but in the most covert and plausible manner, to have no god but their own will—to repudiate a Supreme Being—to renounce the restraints of marriage—to give up all faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—to reject the Bible—to undermine the authority of government—to deem the property of all men common—or, in a word, as the Apostle speaks, to "defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities²." To accomplish these impious designs they erect schools, dispatch emissaries, circulate books, take advantage even of the unoccupied hours of the Sabbath, attract the idle, adapt themselves to the profligate, and put in motion every spring of a most ingeniously contrived machinery.

And shall we not be as forward in the defence of our faith, as they are in the effort to exterminate it? Yea, shall we not, as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, take the offensive,—assail them with "the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God³,"—establish new schools—build new churches—publish cheap tracts—expose their designs—unveil their intentions—make bare their artifices—and, by our lives and conversations, as well as by our zealous endeavours, by our prayers and supplications as well as by our lives and conversations, disappoint their schemes, and undermine their power? Yes, warned by the fate of the disobedient Israelites, the apostate angels, the impure inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, we will not be seduced from our allegiance to "the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ," but resist every attempt to deceive us, with Christian courage and vigilance. Yea, enveloped in the armour of "the common salvation,"—strong in the "strength that is made perfect in weakness⁴,"—"filled with all joy and peace in believing⁵,"—watchful of an enemy within—heedful of an enemy without—having, as a watchword, the name of the Saviour—and confident, in and through him, of final victory, we will expel infidelity from our hearts and habitations, we will "contend for the faith once delivered to the saints."

¹ Rom. xvi, 18.

² These observations, as the reader may imagine, refer to the Socialists.

³ Eph. vi. 17.

⁴ 2 Cor. xii, 9.

⁵ Rom. xv, 13.

ALL SAINTS' DAY.

FOR THE EPISTLE. *Rev. vii., 2 to 12.*

2 And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea,

3 Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

4 And I heard the number of them which were sealed: *and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.*

5 Of the tribe of Judah *were sealed twelve thousand.* Of the tribe of Reuben *were sealed twelve thousand.* Of the tribe of Gad *were sealed twelve thousand.*

6 Of the tribe of Aser *were sealed twelve thousand.* Of the tribe of Nephthalim *were sealed twelve thousand.* Of the tribe of Manasses *were sealed twelve thousand.*

7 Of the tribe of Simeon *were sealed twelve thousand.* Of the tribe of Levi *were sealed twelve*

thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar *were sealed twelve thousand.*

8 Of the tribe of Zabulon *were sealed twelve thousand.* Of the tribe of Joseph *were sealed twelve thousand.* Of the tribe of Benjamin *were sealed twelve thousand.*

9 After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

11 And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

12 Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, *be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.*

The compilers of our liturgy, in selecting this portion of Scripture for the edification of churchmen, have evidently regarded it as a mystical description of the happiness of the blessed in glory, of those blessed, who, in all ages of the world and under all dispensations, have "through faith wrought righteousness, obtained promises¹," and won the crown of life. And if this really be the purport of the vision which the beloved disciple was on this occasion, in spirit, permitted to see, there has been great judgment shown in the adaptation to the present festival of a portion of Scripture, which, although mysterious, is not incomprehensible, and although sublime, is not devoid of applicability to the uses of spiritual instruction. This festival is dedicated to "all saints," or in other words, is a commemoration, on a special day devoted to the purpose, of all

¹ Heb. xi., 33.

the true and holy men that have ever glorified God on earth, and have been called to give him glory and to be glorified in heaven.

And this day's service does not only commemorate holy men departed, but holy beings above, beings whose nature is essentially spiritual, and whose chiefest glory it is to magnify "the glory which excelleth." And although this day's service is specially appointed to commemorate those true and holy men of God, who, in the days of the beloved disciple, had found their reward in heaven, yet must we not, I think, exclude those from the number, who, since his day, have lived in faith, and died in hope; men who, even if they have not, through so "much tribulation, entered into the kingdom of God," have yet been great in his kingdom, and shown, although they have not suffered for his sake, that "faith wrought with their works, and by works was their faith made perfect¹." Of this glorious company of saints does the apostle Paul speak, when he says, "Ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect²." And of this glorious company of saints does the Church on earth speak, when, in their name, she says, "To thee all angels cry aloud, the heavens and all the powers therein, to thee Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of the majesty of thy glory. The glorious company of the apostles, praise thee; the goodly fellowship of the prophets, praise thee; the noble army of martyrs, praise thee. The holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge thee, the Father, of an infinite majesty, thine honourable, true, and only Son, also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter³."

And now we may notice, at greater length, the applicability of the Epistle for the day to the subject in hand. And first, we should understand what is meant by "the seal," which "the servants of God" are here said to have had "on their foreheads." In Ezekiel there is an account of a vision, in which six slayers, apparently about to enter on their work of destruction in the city, are commanded to stay their hand, until "a mark had been set on the foreheads of them that sighed and cried for all the

¹ James ii., 22.

² Heb. xii., 22, 23.

³ Te Deum.

abominations done in the midst thereof¹." And again, the blood on the lintel, when the first-born of Egypt were about to be destroyed, was actually a sign of safety to the Israelites, and the destroying angel, when he saw the sign, passed over their houses, and was not permitted to smite them².

It thus appears, that to "set a seal" upon a person, signifies, in the language of Scripture, to afford him special safety and protection, probably on account of piety and faithfulness, in a season of manifold danger. In times not miraculous, like the present, it would signify an inward sense of comfort and trust in God implanted in the soul by the Holy Spirit, which would support in all dangers, and carry through all temptations, every true servant of God. The Holy Spirit, by imparting this heavenly support, gives the faithful disciple an actual assurance or token, that he claims him as his property, and will preserve him from harm. It is thus also that we may regard the vision in Ezekiel, and the transaction in Exodus. The Lord in both cases saved the faithful from destruction, and indicated his purpose by a sign. And in both cases he saved the faithful, because, as such, they were his property—sealed for security—marked for preservation. The faithful are especially the property of Jesus,—and once he has sealed them as his, "none can pluck them out of his hand³." They are "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise⁴," and they are sealed "unto the day of redemption⁵." It is thus, I think, that we may understand the command in this Epistle, to "seal the servants of God on their foreheads." The Lord thereby indicated that he would preserve his people from falling,—give them grace—keep them safely—and finally,—unless they were again "entangled in the pollutions of the world and overcome," give them everlasting felicity. And the Church of Christ on earth, that is, all the true Israel of God, wheresoever dispersed, is herein declared to have received the mystical sign, thus graciously revealed to it, of the divine love and appropriation.

And then another scene opens, the vision of the Church in heaven, where a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, and all the angels, and the elders, and the four beasts, appear before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and engaged in one glorious and unin-

¹ Ezek. ix., 1, 2, 3, 4.

² Exod. xii., 23.

³ John x., 28.

⁴ Eph. i., 13.

⁵ Eph. iv., 30.

interrupted service of worship, adoration, and praise. And hence does it appear, on a full and further consideration of the purport of the Epistle for the day, that it has, on the whole, been well chosen, and though apparently mysterious, and in some of its features inexplicable, is yet abundant in doctrine not only highly intelligible, but calculated to illustrate forcibly the peculiar character of the festival.

Finally, let us turn all that portion of our subject which is intelligible, to a spiritual and practical use. This is "All Saints' Day." It is dedicated to the memory of all the saints that have been distinguished in the Church for piety, faithfulness, and steadfastness even unto death. Is it not then a day, on which all the baptized disciples of Christ, and all those true servants of a crucified Redeemer, who are "called to be saints¹," and admonished to "follow holiness²," should set about making the inquiry, whether they are or are not practically exemplifying the great doctrine of a "communion of saints?" The saints whom we commemorate to-day, although now saints in heaven, were formerly saints on earth,—and if we have any desire to be one with them, and to have them one with us, we must read their histories, and copy their examples. We must be "followers of them, as they were of Christ³." We must be imitators of their walk on earth, and of their work in heaven. And for what were they especially remarkable? They were remarkable, when on earth, for the union they maintained amongst each other. "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul⁴." They lived, laboured, suffered, and prayed together. And they were remarkable for holiness. They were "blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom they did shine as lights in the world⁵." And they were remarkable for their ardour in praising God and glorifying him. "Whether they did eat or drink, or whatsoever they did, they did all to the glory of God⁶." And in the vision of the beloved disciple they are similarly occupied in heaven.

And behold the encouragement! If we will only believe and love and do service, as did the saints and as becometh the Gospel of Christ, the blood of the Lamb will "whiten our robes," and the power of the Spirit will enable us to triumph. We shall be assured, by his grace dwelling in us and working

¹ Rom. i., 7.

² Heb. xii., 14.

³ 1 Cor. xi., 1.

⁴ Acts iv., 32.

⁵ Phil. ii., 15.

⁶ 1 Cor. x., 31.

with us, of omnipotent protection and succour, and although Satan and his host encompass us, shall have a confident anticipation, that "the foundation of God standeth sure, bearing this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his¹." And behold the other encouragement, the reward and occupation in heaven! And to this, as well as to the other, did the saints, whom we this day commemorate, attain, for they lived and died in faith. And their reward and occupation is to cry with a loud voice and say, "Salvation unto our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might be unto our God for ever and ever!" Amen.

GUNPOWDER TREASON.—Nov. 5.

THE EPISTLE. *Rom. xiii.*, 1 to 7.

LET every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same.

4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he

beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil.

5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

6 For, for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

7 Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is *due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

This day the Church commemorates, with a solemn service, "the happy deliverance of King James I. and the three estates of England from the most traitorous and bloody-intended massacre by gunpowder, and also the happy arrival of his Majesty King William on this day for the deliverance of our Church and nation." In the course of the service, which is very full, an Epistle is appointed to be read, which lays down the duties of Christian subjects with clearness and precision. And the inculcation of these duties is most appropriate on such an anniversary.

¹ 2 Tim. ii., 19.

These, however, having been duly set forth in the comment on the Epistle for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, need not now occupy our attention, except by way of practical application to the subject before us.

The Epistle exhibits, in the first place, a striking portraiture of the sin of resistance to authority, and especially of resistance to authority duly established, and wisely administered. It shows us, in particular, by implication, the exceeding sinfulness of those who, in the reign of King James, were not only determined to resist, but to overthrow the authority of the laws, who would have overwhelmed all the three estates of the realm, if they could have compassed their design, in one vast ruin, and cared not how they worked out their purposes, so that Church and State were destroyed. Let us of the present day, grateful, truly grateful to God for his frustration of these satanic machinations, whereunto we may, in a great measure, ascribe the present prosperous state and continued preponderance of our beloved Church of England, show forth our thanks for the same, not only by a decent observance of this day, but by a consistent and uniform exhibition of loyalty and sound Church principles at all times, by a life of holiness and spirituality, by a life of godliness and quietness.

The next truth that we learn is, that the Queen's Majesty, which is the highest power, as by law established, in this country, must be obeyed by all her subjects. There is no exception made on this head in favour of any mode of faith, form of doctrine, or section of the community. All classes whatsoever, differ though they may greatly in rank, station, influence, or religious opinion, must render unto their Sovereign this great due without any kind of compromise or reserve. And not only is positive obedience due from a Christian subject to his temporal ruler, but indirect deference and subordination. "The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm of England¹," even in any sense, and that man must be held to transgress the apostolical injunction, who submits himself covertly to any foreign or ecclesiastical authority abroad, or to any secret or treasonable society at home. Let none of us then enrol ourselves as members of any secret society. And above all, let us pray God that we may never be tempted to wander from our own pure Church to the Church of Rome, but rather be enabled, through his grace, to feel, understand, and practise our own holy faith more

¹ Article xxxvii.

thoroughly—to love our brethren more than ever—to give unceasing heed to those who have the spiritual rule over us,—and to pay the chief and a wholly undivided allegiance to the Sovereign by law set over us. If our hearts are right in the sight of God, this will most assuredly be the case, and we shall be careful to be “subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.” If, on the other hand, we are deficient in faith, fear, love, and other fruits of the Spirit, we shall be likely to err from this and many other of God’s commandments.

Finally, the Sovereign is the visible head of the Church of England, and in this sense, most undoubtedly, is a “minister of God to us for good.” There never was a form of doctrine or church government more truly apostolical than that which our Sovereign protects and our laws ordain, and which we, blessed be God, are enabled to profess in peace. The Romish church is, indeed, continually plotting against ours, and in political matters striving to gain the ascendancy, and to enlist the sympathies of our rulers on its side. But this, thanks to the wise Providence which frustrated all its former designs, and has built up our present constitution in Church and State on its present secure basis, can never succeed, and we can worship our God, the God of our Protestant forefathers, without harm or detriment, as in times past.

May all Churchmen, then, thankful to God for making their Sovereign a minister of so much good, continue as heretofore loyal and dutiful subjects, and in particular never join with the Romanists in political intrigues against their Church! And may their endeavour ever be, by sound speech, unfeigned faith, holy living, and judicious zeal in the cause of Protestantism, to strengthen the foundations of their Church, making it at the same time their fervent prayer to God, that he may be graciously pleased, in his own good time and manner, to convert the Romanists from the error of their way, and to deliver our beloved church and country “from all false doctrine, heresy, and schism, from hardness of heart, and contempt of his word and commandment¹.”

¹ The Litany.

KING CHARLES THE MARTYR.—JAN. 30.

THE EPISTLE. 1 *St. Peter* ii., 13 to 22.

13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the King, as supreme;

14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.

15 For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

16 As free, and not using *your* liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

17 Honour all *men*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the King.

18 Servants, *be* subject to *your*

masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.

19 For this *is* thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

20 For what glory *is it*, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently! but if, when ye do well, and suffer *for it*, ye take it patiently, this *is* acceptable with God.

21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps;

22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.

The truths taught in this portion of Scripture are, first, the necessity of submission to legally constituted authority, and secondly, the necessity of patience under provocation. Both these truths have already been set forth and commented on in general terms¹. They shall now be brought to bear, and I trust with profit, upon the subject of this day's celebration. And first, the necessity of submission to authority is taught in this portion of Scripture. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well." And again, it is said, "honour the king;" and again, "as free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God." Thus we see that the rebellious proceedings in the reign of King Charles I., which began with resistance to his authority and ended with his destruction, were proceedings carried on in direct opposition to the will of God, as contained in this portion of his word.

It is not necessary, nor will it be profitable for us, assembled as we are now for the spiritual purpose of edification, to enter at all upon a consideration of the political questions involved in this subject. It is not necessary for us to note, how far the king

¹ See the Comments on the *Epistles* for the Second and Third Sundays after Easter.

exceeded his prerogative, or how far the parliament exceeded its duty. Sufficient will it be for us to note, that so far as these passages of Scripture are concerned, rebellion is not justifiable by the law of God¹, and that however mistaken the sovereign of that day was in his notions of the rights of monarchs, there were other and more constitutional modes of undeceiving him than those of rebelling against his authority, and conspiring against his life. We may here aptly remark, how very needful it is that men check themselves in the beginnings of sin. Little, in all probability, was it imagined, when the first opposition to the measures of the ill-fated sovereign began, that it would end in his dethronement and death. And thus may we of the present day learn to check ourselves in the beginnings of political excitement, and not allow ourselves to be so completely carried away thereby, as to involve ourselves in a course of action which may end in crime.

It is worthy of remark, that the Apostle does not allow liberty to be made "a cloke of maliciousness." The injunction may well be borne in mind on an anniversary which brings to our recollection so many and such dismal proofs of the consequences of disobedience to it. We have "liberty," great liberty; but let us beware how we use it for "a cloke of maliciousness," and, in order to advance some supposed popular cause or our own selfish interests, raise commotion under the name of zeal for liberty. Professedly we are "servants of God." And what must the real "servants of God" be? They must be fruitful in every good work of faith; they must "not strive, but be gentle unto all men²," and "do all that they do to the glory of God³." Moreover, Christian people are here told not only to "submit themselves" to the king, but to "honour" him. This implies reverence and respect for his person, as well as deference to his office, and shows, in a still stronger light than ever, the heinous sin of those who not only dethroned their sovereign, but deprived him of life. And finally, the duty of allegiance is enjoined upon us "for the Lord's sake," and because it is his will, and because we are his servants. The Catechism tells us that to God we owe our first duty⁴. Let us often ask ourselves how we are fulfilling it—how far we are working it out—whether we are "seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"—bringing forth the fruits of faith and repentance,—and making every action of our

¹ See Homily xxi. against Rebellion.

² 2 Tim. ii., 24.

³ 1 Cor. x., 31.

⁴ Church Catechism.

lives subservient to the will of God. And may God give us grace to make these inquiries, and to make them often. Above all, may he strengthen our faith in his Son Jesus Christ, without which we can do nothing, and wean our affections gradually from those transitory things of the world, of which "the grace and the fashion doth perish".

Briefly, and in conclusion, we may take notice, that the Apostle here teaches the necessity of being patient under provocation. History informs us, that the unhappy king whose fate we this day commemorate, was full of patience. His sufferings and anxieties were very great and long protracted, but God gave him grace to endure them, and to endure them to the end. It is not often that the high and noble and mighty are visited with affliction; and when they are, they can ill endure it. It was not so with him of whom we are speaking. Whether "buffeted for his faults," or "doing well and suffering for it," he must be acknowledged to have "taken it patiently" in either case, and none ever questioned his meekness of endurance. Let us who have much less to bear, and above all have none of the temptations of high station to bear, be like-minded. Let us follow this example of patience exhibited by a man in high station, and learn a lesson thereby. Let us learn patience—let us learn the necessity of trial—let us learn the uncertainty of all things earthly. And thus warned, thus instructed by so eminent an example, and warned and instructed by the greatest of all examples, Christ Jesus, let us do our best to "run with patience the race that is set before us," looking ever unto him in faith, "who suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."

¹ James i., 11.

THE RESTORATION OF THE ROYAL FAMILY.—MAY 29.

THE EPISTLE. 1 *St. Peter* ii., 11 to 17.

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may, by *your* good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king as supreme;

14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well.

15 For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

16 As free, and not using *your* liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

17 Honour all *men*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the King.

The day on which this portion of Scripture is appointed to be used¹, is a record of God's past mercies to these kingdoms. Then was it that the ancient royal line, the ancient form of government, the ancient Church service and priesthood, so long in disuse, set aside, and under a cloud, were restored; and then was it proved, that, however sinful men, under the garb of religion or any other pretence, may combine for the destruction of established institutions, the providence of God will not suffer their designs to succeed, but, in due time, bring back to their former footing the things that had to all appearance perished. "The Great Rebellion," which for a time seemed to prosper, was thus brought to a close; the crimes committed in it were held up to public execration and punished; and the usurpers and fanatics who had so long seemed to enjoy the pleasant fruits of their own devices, were despoiled of their ill-gotten dignities, and sent into exile.

Greatly, indeed, had the plotters of those days appeared to flourish. Years passed away, and all was well with them. The Church of England was in adversity, and her ministers dared not speak. The friends of royalty wept in secret, and could afford no help. A sort of monarchy, or rule of a single individual, was substituted for the old monarchy, which governed the consciences as well as persons of men with a rod of iron, and while it professed to remedy former abuses, gave currency

¹ It is also appointed to be read on the Third Sunday after Easter, and on the day of the Accession. See the Comments for those days.

to far worse. And well might the depressed people of the land exclaim with the Prophet, "The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary, he hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces, they have made a noise in the house of the Lord, as in the day of a solemn feast. Her gates are sunk into the ground, he hath destroyed and broken her bars, her king and her princes are among the Gentiles, the law is no more, her prophets also find no visions from the Lord¹." But this state of things was, happily for the land, not suffered to continue, and the Lord brought back to these kingdoms, as on this day, in peace and triumph, the son of him whom his enemies treated as a criminal. And as in those days the immediate recipients of God's manifest blessing thought it meet, in token of their joy, to ordain a solemn day of thanksgiving, and to establish it by an ordinance for ever, so may we who participate in the results of the event thus solemnly consecrated, do well to honour it with our lips, and spiritualize it to our souls' service. And how shall we do so?

First, I would suggest that we examine ourselves whether we are in the habit of giving way to any of the sins, or of transgressing any of the commandments herein specified, setting out with the startling fact, that if we are, we may be helping to bring about, in our measure, some of those national calamities, from which, at the present time, we are happily exempt². The sins of a whole world—the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah,—the sins of Nineveh—the sins of Israel and Judah—brought upon the guilty sinners the divine vengeance³. In particular, it is not unreasonable to suppose, that the sins of the nation were visited upon the nation at the time of "the Great Rebellion."

Let us "examine ourselves, then, whether [we are in the faith,] let us prove our own selves⁴." Notwithstanding our formal profession of faith in Christ, notwithstanding even our frequent experimental enjoyment and practical manifestation of it, we may not, at the present time, abstain from every "fleshly lust which wars against the soul." And the fleshly lust, be it remembered, may be as much the parent of one evil thing as of another. Whether it be pride, or envy, or covetousness, or anger, or ambition, or malice, it not only prompts men to sin against

¹ Lam. ii., 7, 9.

² It will be very profitable, on this head, to read at leisure the whole of Rev. xviii.

³ Gen. vi., 7 ; vii., 21 ; xix., 24. Nahum iii. 2 Kings xxiii., 26.

⁴ 2 Cor. xiii., 5.

themselves and against individuals, but against society; to foment insubordination, sedition, conspiracy, opposition to constituted authority, revolutionary combinations, and rebellion, in a word, all things directly or indirectly tending to unsettle existing institutions, gratify selfish aims, and bring contempt and dishonour on kings and magistrates. And let us remember with fear and trembling, while we thus examine ourselves, not only that a fleshly lust, if habitually gratified, may disorder society, but ruin the soul. "When lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death¹."

But, finally, I would suggest that we pray often in private that our political opinions and feelings may never tempt us to sin against the commandments of the Lord. How shall we be kept in any good way, how shall we be preserved from any evil way, except by the governance of God's Holy Spirit? In these then, and all our prayers, in these and all our meditations, may that blessed Spirit ever be with us, teach us better whereinsoever hitherto we have offended, and eventually "guide us into all truth."

THE ACCESSION.—JUNE 20.

THE EPISTLE. 1 *St. Peter* ii., 11 to 17.

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may, by *your* good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king as supreme;

14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well.

15 For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

16 As free, and not using *your* liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

17 Honour all *men*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the King.

As the day of "the Restoration" is a record of God's past mercies to these kingdoms, so is the day of "the Accession" a record both of the continuance of past, and of the prolongation of present mercies. Never since "the Great Rebellion,"

¹ James i., 15.

though commotions have occasionally arisen and plotters have from time to time formed their combinations, has it pleased God so completely to prostrate the nation, as it pleased him to do in that the sorest season of its abasement and humiliation. And may the vengeance of our good and merciful but fearfully powerful God be still and for ever turned away from us; yea, and may his mercy and goodness be poured forth upon our beloved land, (little, indeed, as we deserve it,) in streams of the richest fulness. Above all, may we be constrained, severally and collectively, with the help of God's Spirit, to show how much we value his love by conforming ourselves unceasingly to his will, and particularly by setting forth in our lives, public documents, and formularies, those prominent truths of his religion, which his crucified Son has made known to us. So shall we be a Christian people;—so shall we be a beloved people;—so shall we be “a peculiar people, zealous of good works’¹.”

Let it be our business to consider on this occasion, and to consider with a due attention to their importance, each of the concluding admonitions of the Apostle in the Epistle for this day, “Honour all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honour the king.” And first, we must “honour all men.” And by this it is most probably meant, that we show them all personal respect, and treat them with all outward courtesy. Civility, both in word and manner—the general regulation of the whole demeanour and deportment—affability in the ordinary intercourse—good humour and kindness in the daily dealings—these are all implied and much more, in the commandment to “honour all men.” And it is a fruit of that prominent article of our holy religion, faith, thus to “honour all men;” for faith, if it be true faith, must enter into every thing and regulate every thing, even the common-place habits and manners of every-day life. And if a Christian man be thus faithful, he will never suffer political or any other excitement to make him deviate from what is mannerly and courteous. Party feeling will not tempt him to handle a neighbour roughly, to speak or act with rudeness towards him, or otherwise in his intercourse with him to offend against the laws of good breeding. Yea, party feeling itself will be greatly softened, and perchance, at last, even wholly extinguished beneath the influence of the divine light of the Gospel, and ridicule and sarcasm, harshness and bitterness, evil speaking and evil thinking, will subside and vanish away.

¹ Tit. ii., 14.

We must also "love the brotherhood." If honour is to be rendered to all men indiscriminately, be they friends or strangers, relatives or enemies, higher or lower, saints or sinners, so love must regulate our intercourse with "the brotherhood." "The brotherhood" comprehends all whom the family tie of sisters and brothers in Christ unites in one holy bond of worship and churchmanship, of communion and fellowship, of harmony in faith and practice. And the great aim of the right-minded churchman will be, to regard this relation in its true light, and to esteem all within its range as brothers. If this be done, or attempted to be done, which it ought, the outward class or condition of a neighbour will be no bar to kindly feeling or friendly intercourse on the part of a fellow disciple, but rather the guiding principle by which he regulates his work of love in his behalf, and while there will be no undue familiarity on the part of the superior, or of impertinence on that of the inferior, there will be that Christian understanding between them, which shall most beautifully exemplify the Gospel¹. The believing churchman, then, will "love the brotherhood," that is, love all "who have obtained with him like precious faith²," be they who they may—love whatsoever appertaineth to them, but especially their souls,—and, above all, love those, who are caring for their souls. And while he thus shows his chief benevolence towards that branch of "the brotherhood" to which he belongs, he will not forget to show it to the members of other Christian communities, but "provoke them," by his brotherly kindness and charity, as he has opportunity, "to love and to do good works³." He will "do good unto all men, but especially unto them that are of the household of faith⁴."

And will the Christian churchman ever forget to "fear God?" Oh, no. The fear of God will be one of the leading principles of his life, and "in that fear will he be all the day long⁵." The power as well as the love of God, the reverence of as well as the rejoicing in him, will constrain him to do nothing contrary to his name, but every thing for it, and so guide and move him, that he shall as much dread to offend, as delight to serve him.

And the true churchman will "honour the king." And this he will the more readily do, when he "fears God." He will remember that the Sovereign is God's minister and repre-

¹ Philemon 16.² 2 Pet. i, 1.³ Heb. x, 24.⁴ Gal. vi, 10.⁵ Prov. xxiii, 17.

sentative, and while he conscientiously obeys his authority, will scrupulously reverence his person. He will not take part in tumults, popular outcries, or seditious assemblies, which have for their object, even indirectly, the diminution of the royal authority, but prove at all times, by his quiet obedience under discipline, that the churchman is a Christian in all things, and does not "use his liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as a servant of God." And he has a double motive for so doing, yea and for doing all things whatsoever, namely, the glory of God before men, and the fulfilment of his heavenly will. And if he works heartily, and in the faith, fear, and love of God, he shall not, with God's assistance, "be disappointed of his hope¹." He shall do God's will on earth, and shall glorify his Father which is in heaven.

¹ Psalm cxix., 116.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

**A SERMON, PREACHED AT CHELTENHAM,
AT THE VISITATION OF
THE LORD BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER AND BRISTOL,
IN SEPTEMBER, 1835.**

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